Female 'Self Culture' in Edinburgh: The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society

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The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society met on the first Saturday of each month between 1865-1936 to discuss the books they were reading and to debate prearranged issues. For the first fifteen years its members produced a magazine which carried fictive and general interest articles. This thesis will study the archive of the Society and the magazine that it produced to arrive at an understanding of the women's reading practices, their intellectual lives and their attitudes to the society in which they lived and how these experiences impacted upon them.

At a time when women's societal role was limited and access to education was based on wealth or the philanthropy of others, these women were able (through their privileged place in the middle and upper classes) to construct their own canon of improving reading and to set guidelines for the education of others. Working against the hegemonic discourse of the time, yet seeking to exert some controlling influence over others, the women's attempts at self culture throw into relief the context of their cultural experiences and the correlation between self improvement and women's emancipation.

This thesis argues that prevailing ideas about Victorian women's existence in 'separate spheres' needs to be revised. It argues that the members of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society make a move from the private to the public sphere through their utilisation of culture. Moreover, they are able to blend this notion of spheres to make society their concern through collective and individual action; improving themselves and they community in which they lived.

Acknowledgements and a Note on the Text

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A Note on the Text:

This thesis follows the conventions of the fifth edition of the *MHRA Style Book*. Although it is now becoming less popular, the Modern Humanities Research Association's methods are more pertinent than any rival author/date system in that much of the work quoted and referred to in this work is pseudonymous. Thus, referenced endnotes were deemed to be of more use to the reader.

Contents

Chapter One - Context of study and theoretical background: histories of intellectual lives

This study argues for a new way of looking at the social and cultural practices of late nineteenth and early twentieth century women. Focusing on a group of women who belonged to The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society the study seeks to contribute to an understanding of the import of women's groups in the period, and their consequences for the early women's rights movement.[1] Concentrating on the members of the Society's various sites of involvement with public life this study will highlight the importance of collective action and of self-education in the formation of radical beliefs amongst Victorian and Edwardian women. The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society was founded in 1865 and disbanded in 1935. During this period the female members of the Society founded a literary magazine, wrote and edited it; held debates every month on the issues that affected them; and provided a forum for women to discuss their lives and activities. More long-running than the Langham Place group, the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society acted as a similar seed-bed for reforming activity. One of the central questions of my research has been how this 'seed-bed' was constructed and how the simple joining of a club had so much consequence for its members.

The records left by the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society offer a unique opportunity to assess the relationship between cultural practice and social integration in the study of a group of women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The magazines and minutes of the Society, deposited in the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, enable us not only to track the social and economic pursuits of these women as a group, but also to recover their individual voices. This thesis will look at these women's activities throughout the duration of the Society, whilst focusing on the earlier years when they participated in the production of a magazine. It will follow their move from the private sphere of a drawing-room debating society to the public sphere of philanthropic and educative campaigning. Covering the women's primary sites of activity

in separate chapters this thesis will argue that a new model for the understanding of women's cultural activities and their consequences on social and economic lives is needed. The primary sites of activity are the Society itself; the magazines they produced; their campaigns for further and higher education for women; their participation in debates within the Society; and, the wider public sphere with which they were involved. This study will offer the term 'self-culture', which denotes the women's autonomous practices that gained them access to a wider public sphere, as a model for understanding this phenomenon.

This thesis has utilised, in the main, the magazines of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society, *The Attempt* and *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine*, and the minutes of the Society which are deposited in manuscript form in the National Library of Scotland.[2] Whilst other avenues of information were sought on the women few, save some contemporary biographies and autobiographies, are available. Moreover, it is only those who were involved in the more high profile campaigns, particularly the suffrage movement, that still have an historical presence. It is acknowledged that further information on these women, if it were to come to light, might direct the data in another avenue completely. Such is the nature of historical research, particularly research into women's lives. This study has encountered the difficulties of researching women's histories; most notably the often private nature of their lives without public documentation and more prosaic problems such as women's name changes on marriage.

Primarily, this study brings the existence and importance of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society to light. The archival material that refers to the Society has been employed to present a narrative of the Society from its inception in 1865 to its dissolution in 1935. Furthermore, the thesis argues for the significance of the Society in training and supporting scores of middle-class women in Edinburgh to engage in social and political activities. A discussion of the Society's activities, and the activities of its members, points to a growing publicisation and professionalisation of women at this time,

fostered by collective and community action. Thus the structure of this thesis reflects the movement of the members of the Society from the private occupation of membership of a ladies' club to the more public activities of campaigns for education, suffrage, and work for women. I argue that women were able to utilise their private sphere of culture in the drawing-room to self-educate themselves and allow their further participation in Society. This process is not a neat one; some of the early members of the Society were more prolific campaigners than those that joined in later years, and thus, no teleological progression from private to public can be argued. However, evidence of an increased entrance into the public sphere can be identified.

Methodologies for researching reader experience and cultural history are diverse. This study does not attempt detailed quantitative analyses of reading and writing matter, this would produce only a limited glimpse of a minority of the women's lives. Rather a qualitative approach has been applied, with some sampling to enforce these assumptions.[3] The key issue of the move from private sphere to public sphere is explored through the main areas of the women's interests, such as debating, print culture and education, which form the basis of individual chapters and demonstrate the gradual publicising of the women's activities in these sites of activity. The study to moves from a consideration of those activities, which were least public, such as membership of the Society and participation in its pursuits, through to those which were most public such as suffrage campaigning or publishing.

The progression from private to public is predicated upon the notion of separate spheres; a term which applies only to the middle and upper classes in this period. The public sphere consisted largely of the seats of fiscal and legal power and included the judiciary, business, the church, education and local and national government; in short the world of work and social authority.[4] The private sphere, deemed to be inherently female, consisted of a more domestic milieu; the home and the family were to be the seat of women's limited power. The construction of these 'spheres' in the popular consciousness

is said to have been caused by anxiety about women's potential effect upon the world of work, the supposition that non-domestic women's labour was somehow a usurpation of man's role. Furthermore, it was felt that women's admission into this public sphere was symptomatic of social decay and would lead to the ruination of the nation's children. By the time of the industrial revolution this polarity was certainly a middle or upper class concern as few in the working classes had the leisure or the wealth to disallow women from participation in the public sphere. In the mid and late-nineteenth centuries these terms of private and public held considerable cultural significance, as women were accused of trying to usurp the male sphere by passing into the public stratum. Lee Holcombe noted that, in certain sectors of Victorian community the phrase 'Working Lady' was a contradiction in terms.[5] The oft quoted divine doctrine used to substantiate this claim, 'And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him' (Genesis II, 18) demonstrated for many the divinely subscribed nature of men and women's separate roles. Man was first and therefore independent; woman was dependent on man. Woman's lot was the role of help meet, giving support and encouragement to man.[6] Victorian middle and upper class society was not completely split down public/private, male/female binary oppositions but their existence was palpable. Although it is accepted that this binary opposition between public and private arenas in Victorian women's lives can be limiting this thesis does utilise this paradigm in order to explain the women's negotiations of these spheres of interest. Whilst the members of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society make a general movement from the private to the public sphere in their growing engagement with activities outside the domestic sphere it is too easy to say that as a group they achieved a full progression from one to the other. Some members did lead full and active public lives whereas others were content to remain in a more traditional mode. This thesis will suggest that amongst the members of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society the creation of an alternative public sphere can be observed, it suggests that these women negotiated 'borderlands' of influence

located between the private and the public in order to navigate their entry into a less restrictive sphere. A fuller treatment of the discourses that influenced the women in question's lives is applied to later discussions of the liminal areas of public life that were open to women in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

This private sphere that women were ascribed, is largely discussed in this study in terms of culture. It is argued that an interest in, and use of, cultural pursuits largely facilitated their move into the public sphere. Specifically this thesis traces a progression from a reading and debating group that constantly discussed culture, through the publication of a magazine that exhibited these discussions, to an interest in self culture and education, and lastly, to an integration with cultural and social institutions in the public sphere. The impact of culture upon a group of Scottish Victorian women will be used as a case study for an analysis of the reading and culturally-aware subject as prototype for the social activist.

Establishing first that the Society was of a literary and broadly cultural nature, this chapter will utilise existing paradigms for assessing audiences and reader experience. The usefulness of looking at the women both individually and as a group is assessed through an examination of ideas of interpretive communities and an acceptance that much work done on recovering the cultural histories of particular groups in history has previously been made through an analysis of individuals. This chapter will also place a study of the Society in the context of the study of Victorian women in general and specifically in Scotland. It will place the women's production of a magazine in the context of other women's magazines of the time, specifically those written and produced by women for women.

The Cultural Nature of the Group

Although there is only limited evidence of actual reading experience in the records of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society, the approach used by historians of reading is pertinent for this study because it looks at the effects of culture on the historical subject. Some historians attempt to recover actual readers in history: this thesis will recover the cultural experiences of actual women and relate this to their movement from private to public sphere. Jonathan Rose, a leading historian of reading practices has claimed that, 'My subject – which has been remarkably neglected by reader-response critics – is the response of the actual ordinary reader in history'.[7] This thesis will adopt a similar approach by engaging with the centrality of reading and culture in nineteenth century women's lives and show the effects of that interest in their socio-political concerns. In an earlier essay Rose also noted:

> But in an important sense Altick is entirely right to feel that his field has been neglected. Where the old book history studied what people read and whether they could read and the new book history studies how they read, neither has really explored mass intellectual responses to reading. 'The English Common Reader' actually only devoted one chapter to 'The Self-Made Reader', but all the rest of the book pointed to that subject. And since then hardly anyone has systematically attacked the basic question that Altick has raised: How do texts change the minds and lives of common (i.e. non-professional) readers?[8]

In answer to Rose's question in 'Rereading the English Common Reader: A Preface to a History of Audiences', this thesis will show through a definable (though not homogenous) group of readers, how texts influence the intellectual life of an individual, or community of readers. Although Rose suggested that Richard Altick's[9] clarion call for studies on the reading practices of the common person had not yet been answered, his more recent work, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, responds to his own call for a history of audiences:

> This book addresses a question, which, until recently, was considered unanswerable. It proposes to enter the minds of ordinary readers in history, to discover what they read and how they read it.[10]

Rose goes on to state that his book will look specifically at the British working classes, most especially those who were autodidacts, suggesting that it would be easier to recover the intellectual lives of those who are higher up the economic scale, 'authors, literary critics, professors, and clergymen'.[11] Although the women studied in this thesis come from this economic class, their intellectual lives are just as difficult to recover as those that Rose brings to light in his 2001 study. Like the 'common men' that feature in both Rose and Altick's work, the members of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society were excluded from the higher echelons of education. Although they may have received some basic schooling, it was unlikely to be as rigorous as that conferred upon their brothers. Moreover a study of this nature is able simultaneously to recover, not only the intellectual lives of these women, but their responses to the nascent women's movement as individuals, as a group and as campaigners. Thus this thesis is able to extend Rose's conception of the 'history of audiences' to ascertain, not only the individuals of this audience, but the audience as a collective. As producers of text as well as its consumers, these women give some insight into what it was to be the cultivator of such an audience. Rose's term 'audience' is useful here; 'audience' rather than 'reader' is suggestive of the whole cultural diet rather than simply textual appreciation.[12] This is particularly pertinent to this study, which takes into account not just reading but also writing and speaking.

Ephemeral in nature, women's reading choices and practices were perhaps thought too marginal for consideration by early book and reading historians. In mid-Victorian Scotland middle-class women were largely unseen in the public arena (except perhaps in a domestic setting as hostess). Their 'public' was much more peripheral, at the edges of society, and as such difficult to reconstruct. Their reading, which falls into the 'private sphere', is even further from our reach. The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society enacts a shift from a genteel reading and literary society to one whose members became a

force for change in bourgeois Edinburgh. The diversity of their approaches to literary pursuits and to political commitment will be explored but they are united by a common interest in literature and a growing sense of social if not political engagement.

Historians of the book and of reading often assume that the mysterious cut-off point where the reader began to read silently and for pleasure marked the end of the collective reading of a text.[13] More recently this dichotomy between the public and the private has been scrutinised by academics, as they begin to look at the ethnography of reading, the social demographics that are involved in interpretation, and the impact of a collective reading practice. Scholars such as Elizabeth Long have argued for the cultural and political importance of reading in a group,[14] and Elizabeth McHendry[15] has stressed the role that reading and literary groups played in the politicisation of African American groups in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Elizabeth Long emphasises the inherently social aspect to reading, firstly in that we need to be taught to read by others, and secondly, without an intricate infrastructure of book production, market research, and reviewing we would have nothing to read.[16] She continues by suggesting that reading is framed by an authoritative network of institutional directives, what to and what not to read. Cultural capital is assigned to the right kind of book reading and a certain amount of individuality is lost. A socio-cultural assessment of any reader must take into account the pressures that are thrust upon the reader with regards to choice of reading matter.

> Reading in groups not only offers occasions for explicitly collective textual interpretation, but encourages new forms of association, and nurtures new ideas that are developed in conversation with other people as well as with the books. Reading groups often form because of a subtext of shared values, and the text itself is often a pretext (though an invaluable one) for the conversation through which members engage not only with the authorial 'other' but with each other as well. In such groups, reading becomes more communal than our image of the scholar-anchorite would have it, and more active than the picture of reading as leisured feminine pastime. I have claimed elsewhere that they occupy a social space that calls our received distinction between public and private into question, and offer forums for critical reflection that have been crucial in negotiating the moral and ideological dimensions of social identity.[17]

Here Long suggests that reading groups complicate the private/public division, thus proposing that reading can be an active and indeed a political act, which can in turn lead to a bringing to light of the readers' identities. Her argument has significant implications for reading groups that admitted only women, in a period when women's social and political status in society was particularly limiting; collective reading can be understood as a seed-bed for social and political reform.

Whilst reading groups in the nineteenth century may have been set up initially to discuss what the ladies were reading and the comparative merits of individual authors, the women of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society clearly began to question issues in a wider arena. Moreover, the practicalities of forming and organising a society were to give these women a taste of a more public life. Minute-taking and the formation of procedures and rules gave the women the skills needed to regulate and manage in legislative forums. Debating and reporting back on the books they had read taught them valuable lessons in public speaking. Writing for their Ladies' magazines put their education into print and the public's eye. Uncovering their skills, their voices, and their ability to persuade in the relatively private and supportive arena of the drawing-room reading club, gave the women the confidence to begin to address areas of civic reform.

The formation of reading associations acting as a springboard to social and political reform is not a phenomenon confined to middle-class Victorian ladies but has been observed in other minority groups. Elizabeth McHendry has studied the exploration of identity through reading in groups of African Americans in the nineteenth century:

> From the 1830s on, African Americans formed literary societies that encouraged reading and writing from their members, developing a nationwide literary community with authors, editors, and publishers who shared an interest in their literature. Proponents of building this community urged the merits of individual and group expression for informing, exploring and validating their unique identity as 'Coloured Americans' while asserting their right to full U.S. citizenship.[18]

Although very different in their situations, African Americans and Edinburgh Ladies in the nineteenth-century did share some similarities; both were disenfranchised

and marginal to the hegemonic discourse of the societies that they lived in, and both were able to find their voices and their campaigning rhetoric in the supportive networks that reading groups afforded. These reading and writing groups are characterised by their participants' will to self-improvement, their growing confidence and their questioning of the social and political arena from which they were excluded. Participation in society stems from an involvement in the limited (though not limiting) reading and writing societies. McHendry goes on to state that literary societies amongst the African American population of nineteenth-century America were particularly successful for women:

> Although black men maintained their interest in literary communities, it was middle and upper-class black women who more often expressed their understanding that reading could be used to realise an active role in promoting change. Although one purpose of their literary activities was to diversify the ceaseless monotony overhanging them, their reading was not an idle practice. (...) Reading was a means of clarifying and stimulating their political desires, not pacifying them.[19]

Lacking the voice that a fully emancipated citizen in the nineteenth century would have, the female members of literary societies were able to imagine for themselves, through reading, writing and participation in the small society of the club, a fuller and more active role. The sense of identity that was formed and *practised* in the literary society greatly furthered women's campaign for social justice in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Victorian Feminism

In order to examine these women's histories, the complex field of Victorian gender politics needs to be understood. To use the term 'feminist' is problematic when dealing with the women of the Victorian period. The term only came into common usage after the beginning of the twentieth century and to apply our perceptions of the term is to impose more recent developments in the struggle for women's rights on to women who could have had no notion of suffrage campaigns, the sexual revolution, and equal opportunities. Some scholars choose to use the term proto-feminist to indicate that the

women concerned with the furthering of women's rights in the Victorian period did so in a vastly different manner. However, following the work of Caine[20] and Levine[21] it is possible to use the term with caution and argue for a continuance of feminist sentiment from before the Victorian period, having its origins in works such as Wollstonecraft's, and encompassing a variety of women-orientated beliefs which have grown into the discernible feminist movement of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

In *Victorian Feminists* Barbara Caine questions the traditional view that early Feminism and Liberalism were inextricably linked. She points to a growing realisation amongst historians of the range of *feminisms* that were emergent at this time. Furthermore she shows that the complexities of women's reaction to their unequal position in society has been the focus of more recent debate on the origins of a feminist approach. Caine argues that the forms feminism took in the Victorian period are characterised by their diversity of both origin and political commitment and problematises the link between feminist belief and liberalism; highlighting the importance of the church, socialism and even conservatism in the formation of Victorian feminism. Caine goes on to postulate that the feminist project as seen by Victorian women was not necessarily to eradicate the differences between men and women but often to highlight those differences; biological determinism was not then as it is now the scourge of feminist beliefs. Victorian feminists were not merely concerned with the gaining of access for women to positions of power and authority in society but a close analysis of the differences between the sexes and the role of women in the home as well as outside.

While acknowledging the diversity within Victorian feminisms some clear battle lines can be observed: those who supported the enfranchisement of women against those who did not; those who believed that women were fundamentally different from men and those who fought for precise equality between the sexes; those that felt that women had a place in the universities and in science and technology against those who maintained that a woman's role was firmly domestic.[22] One of the best ways of understanding these 'two

sides', as suggested by Kate Millett, is to consider two contemporary sources, Mill's *Subjection of Women* (1869) (co-written with Harriet Taylor) and Ruskin's *Of Queen's Gardens* (1864).[23] Mill 'encounters the realism of sexual politics' whilst Ruskin explores 'romance and the benign aspect of the myth'.[24] Whilst these contemporary accounts are concerned with the 'nature' of woman, the tendency is now to look at their experiences and practices. Recent historians of the Victorian period have tended to highlight the importance of women's groups at this time. Whilst acknowledging the diversity of an embryonic will to have the rights of women at least open to discussion, these historians also emphasise the significance of support networks that could welcome all these opinions whilst giving these women an opportunity to air their differing views.[25]

The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society offers the opportunity to explore the articulation of highly personal responses to specific issues of concern for women and to the larger debates of the day. Through the Society women found a testing ground and support network where private ideas could be fine-tuned, within a female-orientated space, into positions they could adopt in the wider public sphere. It is possible to discern a direct line from these supportive female environments where women were able to see the talents and abilities of their peers, share feelings of companionship, and offer assistance in all forms to the women's movement where these concerns were writ large. For the women in this study, interaction and debate with other women brought new and profitable relationships, new opinions, and the confidence to air them in a public sphere. Thus whilst criticising the prevailing male discourse of their society in word and in deed, they were also extolling the vitality of women's contribution to society and honing their abilities to take into them a new arena. These networks and groups in the mid-Victorian period were the forums in which many of the questions that concerned women were debated.

The diversity of subjects debated is important here. In the debates of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society there was no simple question such as 'Should women be on

an equal footing with men?' rather the questions they addressed were aligned to the political, social and religious debates that surrounded them in all walks of life. Questions on the need to marry, the educational needs of boys and girls, how single women were to support themselves, the state of the poor, the importance of a liberal education were paramount in male and female circles but were central to the development of a women's movement later in the century. Barbara Caine argues that conservatism was inherent in much Victorian feminism:

> This framework gave Victorian Feminists a concern about women's social and moral duties, about their need to preserve a moral order and create social harmony, which is certainly not shared by their 20th century counterparts, but which gives Victorian Feminism its distinctive character.[26]

As will be shown, this conservatism was able to co-exist with a growing radicalisation amongst the members of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society; indeed the Society could be seen as a microcosm of those tensions that continue to beset feminist thinking; namely the conflict between biological determinism and separatism. The diversity of the opinions brought to these formal and informal groups are emblematic of the problems facing Victorian women.

The Scottish Context

If there is a dearth of work on individuals and groups of women in the Victorian period in England then there is a veritable drought in Scotland. One of Scotland's leading historians, T. C. Smout, has written:

> The history of the family, and of child upbringing and the place of women within and without the home, is so neglected in Scotland as to verge on becoming a historiographical disgrace.[27]

Since this statement was made there have been several works or chapters in books completed on individual causes that concerned Victorian women, but no work has yet had the scope of Levine, Caine or Vicinus for women north of the border. Those works that

do deal with single issues, such as Leah Leneman's thoroughly researched *A Guid Cause: The Women's Suffrage Movement in Scotland*,[28] acknowledge this lack of breadth:

> ...for the Victorian women's movement in Scotland was very effective indeed and has not begun to receive the coverage it deserves. Even here it cannot do so, since the subject of this book is the struggle for the vote, while the Victorian movement encompassed many other aspects of women's lives as well, such as education, entry to the professions, and married women's legal rights. (...) the Victorian women's movement in Scotland deserves an entire book.[29]

Other studies have concentrated on working-class Scottish women's experiences. Collections such as those by Esther Breitenbach and Eleanor Gordon have shown the variety of experiences of Scottish women but as they are collections of essays on single-issue subjects, such as women rent-strikers or domestic service, they do not have the holistic approach suggested by Leneman.[30] By concentrating on a relatively small group of women who were involved in multifarious causes this study addresses Smout's and Leneman's call for more in-depth work on the early Scottish women's movement. However, the situation in Scotland is not necessarily as central to a discussion of the Society as one may think. Certainly, in the area of magazine production women saw their peers as being south of the border and there are few mentions in the magazines, debates or minutes of the Society that suggest that the women considered themselves to be particularly Scottish. As a result of this, this study will not solely compare the women's activities with those of other women in Scotland but will recognise that the members of the Society saw little difference between campaigns that were north or south of the Border.

Interpretive Communities

Showalter identifies the 1860s as the period in which women's subculture began to consolidate itself. This can be seen most clearly in their forays into the largely male world of publishing during this decade. Although there were many Ladies' magazines in

the early Victorian period they tended to be domestic and traditionalist in tone; they would either ignore or be scathing about the growing women's movement and usually had male proprietors and editors. However, some magazines that began to emerge in the 1860s were more radical in tone and were published and edited by women for women. Bessie Parkes summed up the influence of the women's press in *Essays on Woman's Work* in 1865:

> With the growth of the press has grown the direct influence of educated women on the world's affairs. Mute in the Senate and in the church, their opinions have found a voice in sheets of ten thousand readers.[31]

Margaret Beetham outlines the various women's magazines that emerged on the market in the nineteenth century in her 1996 book, *A Magazine of Her Own?Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine, 1800-1914*, and identifies those few magazines that began to be published around 1860 as the first in a line of magazines that dealt with women's rights.[32] *The English Woman's Journal*, which was published between 1858 and 1864 and edited by Bessie Parkes and Mary Hays, discussed the early women's rights movement (at this point clearly liberal, urban and middle-class) in a practical and informative manner in monthly issues. It later merged with the *Alexandra Magazine* (1864-6) but this venture was not successful. Later came *The Englishwomen's Review* which continued the work until 1910.[33] As Beetham posits, these magazine were the forerunners to a multitude of publications that supported the women's rights movement in the early twentieth century:

> It was a thin trickle which became a stream, if not a torrent, of words between 1900 and 1914 when, for the first time ever, there was a lively and diverse periodical press which spoke to and for women in terms of their rights, especially the right to vote.[34]

However, none of these magazines advocated a complete programme for the achievement of women's rights, as Beetham notes:

> In the 1890s, 'the Woman Question' continued to provide subject matter for debate but, in the dynamic between the ideological in which magazines were made, addressing the strong-minded woman seemed incompatible with selling copies.[35]

In their collection, *Victorian Women's Magazines: An Anthology*, Beetham and her co-editor Kay Boardman, are the first to acknowledge the existence of *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* in a work on Victorian textual production.[36]

The production of the magazine cemented the collective nature of the group fostering social ties and allowing the women to share a collective, anonymous voice. United under 'the voice' of the magazines they were able to interpret their lives and situations in a collective manner. The thoughts concerning nationality put across in Benedict Anderson's work *Imagined Communities* are significant for this study of the community-nature of the debating society.[37] Furthermore, Anderson's view of how print laid the foundation for national consciousness can be related to the importance of the magazine for the members of the Society. His three points elucidating the effects of print are equally applicable to the Society: that print created unified fields of exchange and communication; gave fixity to the language; and created a language of power to which citizens (and for our case, the women) had access.[38] Thus the magazines can be seen as the print-culture base of an interpretive community; allowing for a commonality of language and communication between the women members. Furthermore, Anderson posits that it is culture and not politics that brings about notions of nationality and identity and this, of course, is analogous to the situation of the women to be considered.

Reader Response theory is one area of criticism which has had significant implications for scholars studying readers and culture in history. However, much of the work dome in this field presents the reader as a solitary entity – encountering the cultural text on his or her own. The subjective and psychoanalytic readers suggested by Bleich and Holland, Wolfgang Iser's phenomenological reader, Judith Fetterley's resisting reader who as a woman brings the history of her gender to her reading, and the 'ideal reader' who, in collusion with the author is able to bring out all the significance of the text, all experience the text alone. Fewer theorists have interrogated the concept of a

community of readers. Questions raised, but yet to be answered concern the relevance of the socio-economic and historical position of the reader, questions of relative literacy and the power networks which influence what is read. Alongside this, the value and meaning that a reader attributes to what is read needs to be evaluated. This new 'textology' as Robert Darnton argues needs to be played through actual reading experiences in the historical record.[39]

However, some Reader Response criticism does suggest relevant paradigms for this study. Using Stanley Fish's model of the 'interpretive community', first introduced in *Interpreting the Variorum* in 1976, which suggests that readers 'rewrite' texts according to their own situation and the 'community' to which they belong, it is possible to come to some synthesis of understanding how the members of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society sanctioned and appraised texts and discourses to be read by themselves and their peers.[40] While the reading and cultural experiences for some of these individual women may be reconstructed through anecdotal evidence in the magazines, the minutes of the Society, and their own personal testimonies, the Society also demonstrates the reading of culture within a community of like-minded people. As a group the women met to comment and expand upon their intellectual lives at a time when this was a radical, if not subversive act. The reading that informed their views and the importance of sharing and discussing that reading will be of primary importance to this study. As the applications of Fish's argument suggests, it is only possible to discuss these women's reading experiences in the light of their very personal, and indeed unusual, circumstances. Although there can be no totalising view of how women in Victorian Scotland gathered in their drawing-rooms to discuss their intellectual lives this is a local account of how one group did so. A microcosmic view can still be useful, however, when it is compared to women in other groups to find alliances and misalliances in their experiences.[41] As Fish states:

> Linguistic knowledge is contextual rather than abstract, local rather than general, dynamic rather than invariant; every rule is a rule of thumb; every competence grammar is a performance grammar in disguise. This is why [a universalist] theory will never succeed: it cannot help but borrow its terms and its content from that which it claims to transcend, the mutable world of practice, belief, assumptions, point of view, and so forth.[42]

Thus several studies which are specific in their focus can shed light on the subject as a whole, but those works which are wide in scope and address issues without contextualising them locally, are likely to fail. This ideological analysis of readers and their personal situations will also take account of critics of Fish, such as Edward Said, who state the importance of analysis of the reading subject's social, political and historical placement:

> If, as we have recently been told by Stanley Fish, every act of interpretation is made possible and given force by an interpretive community, then we must go a great deal further in showing that situation, that historical and social configuration, what political interests are concretely entailed by the very existence of interpretive communities.[43]

This study engages with Said's comments and shows the 'historical and social configuration' of the interpretive community of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society by an analysis of the women's background and activities and by relating their construction of their leisure and work pursuits to their functioning as a community of readers.

To understand further how this community of readers approached the texts that they confronted, this study will also engage with the feminist criticism of Judith Fetterley and her idea of the 'Resisting Reader'.[44] Fetterley's argument concerning the power relations inherent in the male canon of literature and women's inability to read the cultural text from anything other than an exterior position, suggests that the women of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society may be seen as creating a canon of literature for their own consumption, one which valorised their concerns as opposed to those of the prevailing hegemonic discourse. The sociology and politics of the interpretive community are foregrounded in Fetterley's work and as such they can form a fuller picture of the interaction of text and reader. Indeed this interaction can be said to be a place of

production, where the readers reproduce the text to conform to their own interpretive and ideological community and circle. As Mary Louise Pratt argues, by exploring the specifics of the reader's social and political milieu, by showing the conditions of their response to their reading, it is possible to posit the act of reading as an act of production.[45] Pratt also regards the site of power relations as important in the interpretive community; by identifying the sources of power, both local and general, in the lives of the members of the Society a fuller understanding of their interpretive reading strategies can be gained.

The combination of these feminist and Marxist modes of interpretation can be utilised to discuss the formation of a personal canon for the Society's members. The didactic modes of discussing literature and culture which are prevalent in the pages of the Society's magazines point to an interest, if not an obsession, with the value of literature and the meaning attached to an individual's choice of literature. This didacticism, with its watchwords of 'how-to', and more often than not 'how-not-to' read, point to the women's engagement with the influence of reading and the centrality of the written word to their constructions of self and society. A consideration of this kind must be concerned with the mores of society outside the interpretive community and assess whether the views expressed by the women on the subject of 'suitable' and 'valuable' reading were sites of resistance or conformity to a more general view of literature and culture.

The Woman Reader

Book historians, and more recently, reading historians have long been analysing the impact of print culture on different groups. Richard Altick was one of the first writers to fully consider the impact and uses of reading and the advance of literacy for the 'common' man (and it was usually a man) in his study *The English Common Reader.*[46] Altick stresses the importance of utilitarianism as a motive for learning to read and reading as a pastime. This was as true for the eighteenth-century men that his study

concerns itslef with as for the Victorian women that this thesis will examine. Altick's 1957 work actively proposed the further cataloguing of reading experiences and acted as a clarion call for further studies in this area. As he noted:

> There is room for literally hundreds of studies which are here merely sketched.[47]

Whilst Altick has stated that this project has only partially been carried out, recent studies have indicated that his survey of the English common reader is not entirely satisfactory. Although early works such as Altick's study and Louis James' *Fiction for the Working Man*[48] are helpful on the spread of print and literacy among the lower middle classes and upper working classes, they are almost mute on the subject of women readers. Of course James' title should alert us to this fact. Present historians of reading are more interested in the experience of reading, not just its practice. For example, Rose's recent work on working-class lives does not simply list the reading matter of its subject but asks what the readers did with what they read; how did they construct their reading experience?[49] The study has to be widened outside England and be concerned with gendered reading experiences and those of communities, not just individual readers. In more recent years concern has focused on how holistic pictures of these reader experiences can be recovered either from the record or from the readers themselves after the fact of reading. These studies range from the early proposals of Robert Darnton in his work, *The Kiss of Lamourette*,[50] which advocates a need to choose between macro and micro analytical studies, to the studies of contemporary gender-based reader response initiated by Janice Radway in *Reading the Romance*[51] and further developed by Jenny Hartley in her work on contemporary reading groups.[52]

These various methodologies can be utilised to provide a holistic response to the research of cultural practices and experiences amongst an identified social or economic group. Radway notes:

> In further discussing the lack of institutionalised emotional support suffered by contemporary American women, Chodorow has observed that in many pre-industrial societies women formed their own social networks through which they

> supported and reconstituted one another. Many of these networks found secondary institutional support in the local church while others simply operated as informal neighbourhood societies. In either case, the networks provided individual women with the opportunity to abandon temporarily their stance as the family's self-sufficient emotional provider. They could then adopt a more passive role through which they received the attention, sympathy, and encouragement of other women. With the increasing surbanisation of women, however, and the concomitant secularisation of the culture at large, these communities became exceedingly difficult to maintain. The principal effect was the even more resolute isolation of women within their domestic environment.[53]

Radway argues that for the women of modern-day America, industrialisation and the loss of local institutional networks, like the church, forced women into the home and away from traditional support systems. This thesis suggests that this process was already underway in the middle-class drawing rooms of Edinburgh by the end of the nineteenth century. For the middle-class and upper-class women who had recently been ousted from 'traditional' 'womanly' roles as domestic provider and primary child-carer, the time spent in leisure and recreational pursuits (often alone) greatly outweighed that spent in any domestic or civic duties. This thesis therefore looks at the ways in which these women, educated to some extent and in sound financial positions, constructed their leisure and recreation. However, unlike the women encountered by Radway, it will be seen that the members of the Society were able to use their exclusion or isolation to advantage; indeed their leisure was shaped to achieve self-education and to negotiate their entry into the public sphere.

In response to expositions of reading theory in the 1980s by such theorists as Stanley Fish and Wolfgang Iser, feminist writers began to develop a gendered reading theory. Drawing on their work this study clearly has to confront the fact that it is dealing with women readers and to confront the question do women read differently? A leading writer on this subject is Patrocinio Schweickart, who in her pioneering article 'Reading Ourselves: Towards a Feminist Theory of Reading', synthesises the developments in gendered reading hypotheses.[54] She identifies two constituent aspects of gendered reading theory: firstly the 'resisting reader' as identified by Judith Fetterley, a reader who avoids

the masculine assumptions built into androcentric texts; and the retrieval from obscurity of women's texts and refiguration of the canon, exemplified by Elaine Showalter and others. Schweickart is further interested in the importance of the difference in women's reading and what it might mean to 'read as a woman', which is in itself is an interpretation of Jonathan Culler's essay, 'Reading as a woman':

> If the experience of literature depends upon the qualities of a reading self, one can ask what difference it would make to the experience of literature and thus to the meaning of literature if this self were, for example, female rather than male. If the meaning of a work is the experience of a reader, what difference does it make if the reader is a woman?[55]

Schweickart draws attention to the fact that whilst reader-response criticism has argued about the way in which people read and the reader's engagement with the text, it rarely considers what is read. She writes:

> The feminist entry into the conversation brings the nature of the text back into the foreground. For feminists, the question of *how* we read is inextricably linked with the question of *what* we read. More specifically, the feminist inquiry into the activity of reading begins with the realisation that the literary canon is androcentric, and that this has a profoundly damaging effect on women readers.[56]

Thus reading theory must, in her view, move from a process of unmasking latent motives in reading to the repossession of women's active role in their reading processes. This shift had already been activated in women's literary criticism, most notably by Showalter, who asked the questions: 'What does it mean for a woman to express herself in writing? How does a woman write as a woman?'[57] Schweickart extends this to reading and asks:

> What does it mean for a woman to read without condemning herself to the position of other? What does it mean for a woman, reading as a woman, to read literature written by a woman writing as a woman?[58]

Eventually Schweickart argues for an understanding of the community-based nature of the reading and writing process for women:

> ... we should strive to redeem the claim that it is possible for a woman, reading as a woman, to read literature written by women, for this is essential if we are to make the literary enterprise into a means for building and maintaining connections among women.[59]

This thesis will uncover such a community of readers and writers and it is suggested that this model will serve as example for Schweickart's claims for a gender-based theory of reading. Moreover, an examination of the dynamics that inflect this neglected group will shed light on the importance that these women attributed to their gender when encountering cultural discourses.

Schweickart's negotiation of the figure of the female reader has been extended in the work of writers as diverse as Annette Kolodny, Margaret Homans, Louise Rosenblatt, Janice Radway, Mary Jacobus and Cathy N. Davidson.[60] These writers have placed the feminine reading subject at the heart of their criticism and have posited her as a place to reconstruct the feminist literary canon, or simply as an element that literary criticism cannot ignore. Slowly feminist writers have interrogated every area of literary criticism to make sure that it recognises the importance of the gender of a text's audience. For instance, in her essay 'Feminism, New Historicism and the Reader' Wai-Chee Dimock argues that New Historicism elides the reader with the history of the text, and therefore loses a potentially gendered reading position and all that this might mean for the reception of the text.[61] She seeks in her essay to redress that balance and to widen New Historicism to recognise the reader and its implications for the text's history.

Subcultures

Elaine Showalter's project to bring to light an alternative female canon and her ideas about sub-cultures are of import for this study.[62] Her work seeks to recover lost writers and to reinstate them to literary prominence; this analysis of a group of Victorian women readers seeks to reinstate their work into the histories of Edinburgh, Scotland and the early women's movement. Showalter's work necessarily surmises that the invisibility of a women's literary canon is a direct result of women's invisibility in the social and political world before the twentieth century. Thus both projects interrelate; the process of

recovery is indistinguishable from the relating of historical facts concerning women. Showalter recognised that she was part of this interdisciplinary process:

> The interest in establishing a more reliable critical vocabulary and a more accurate and systematic literary history for women writers is part of a larger interdisciplinary effort by psychologists, sociologists, social historians, and art historians to reconstruct the political, social and cultural experience of women.[63]

Showalter uses the idea of a women's 'subculture' to understand women's cultural production and its reception in contradistinction to patriarchal society. She quotes Nancy Cott's perspective on this subculture:

> 'We can view women's group consciousness as a subculture uniquely divided against itself by ties to the dominant culture. While the ties to the dominant culture are the informing and restricting ones, they provoke within the subculture certain strengths as well as weaknesses, enduring values as well as accommodations'.[64]

She goes on to identify the ideology of separate spheres as the root of this female subculture; with women separated from the sites of power in society, whether fiscal, legal, medical or political, they had to create their own subcultures that mirrored male public life. Woman, relegated (or indeed, promoted) to the position of 'Angel in the House', who were the guardians of moral and social behaviour but without power outside of their sphere, created communities and social spaces of their own.[65] Such a subculture was the basis of a woman's life in the Victorian period:

> By 'subculture' we mean simply 'a habit of living' ... of a minority group which is self-consciously distinct from the dominant activities, expectations and values of a society. Historians have seen female church groups, reform associations, and philanthropic activity as expressions of this subculture in actual behaviour, while a large and rich body of writing by and for women articulated the subculture impulses on the ideational level. Both behaviour and thought point to child-rearing, religious activity, education, home life, associationism, and female communality as components of women's subculture. Female friendships, strikingly intimate and deep in this period, formed the actual bonds.[66]

Showalter suggests that this community subculture bound women together in a 'minority experience':

> From the beginning, however, women novelists' awareness of each other and of their female audience showed a kind of covert solidarity that sometimes amounted to a genteel conspiracy. Advocating sisterhood, Sarah Ellis, one of the most conservative writers of the first Victorian generations, asked: 'What should

> we think of a community of slaves, who betrayed each other's interests? Of a little band of shipwrecked mariners upon a friendless shore who were false to each other? Of the inhabitants of a defenceless nation, who would not unite together in earnestness and good faith against a common enemy?'[67] Mrs Ellis felt the binding force of the minority experience for women strongly enough to hint, in the prefaces to her widely read treatises on English womanhood, that her female audience would both read the messages between her lines and refrain from betraying what they deciphered.[68]

This idea of community not only applies to writers: Kate Flint identifies the debate about men and women's reading that was circulating during the Victorian period in her book *The Woman Reader 1837-1914*, and interrogates it in relation to patterns to which women's reading was subjected. The didactic debate about women's reading which was voiced by both men and women was, Flint suggests, a way of enabling those commentators access to cultural capital:

> Whether conducted by men or by women, this discussion was very frequently used to uphold and reinforce dominant patriarchal structures. Those women who voiced their anxieties about how vulnerable girls could be to certain types of reading helped to circulate and make familiar these conservative attitudes and terminology. To do this gave them access to cultural capital, in Pierre Bourdieu's sense of the term: commenting on and censoring the behaviour of their own sex was one means by which they could readily wield authority in a society where direct access to public expression of opinion could be difficult for a woman. At the same time, the form this advice-giving often took was to adopt the caring voice of the wise mother.[69]

This legislation of reading matter is very evident in the discussions and writings of the women discussed in this thesis and Flint's arguments concerning these motives form a useful backdrop to the debate. This notion of legislation is emblematic of Flint's work as a whole; she sees women's reading practices and experiences not simply at face value but as having wider implications for how women were viewed by society and how they functioned within it. Thus the discussion of a cultural pursuit can be widened to discuss a culture as a whole. The opposing ideas of consumption and education are central to Flint's thesis on women's reading: women were figured as consumers of 'light literature' whilst having a deep need for the education that their reading could provide if they were to engage fully in society. This duality of the purpose of reading, which figures women both

as passive consumers and active users, posits reading practice as the site of a power struggle between men and women in Victorian society.[70]

As Kate Flint argues, other than Amy Cruse's very early discussion of women readers in the Victorian period, there have been few discussions of women as reading subjects in their period.[71] Cruse showed in her 1935 work, and it will be demonstrated by the breadth of reading material discussed by the members of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society, that Victorian women not only read for escapism but read in recognition of the milieu that they were in. They read controversial works, which voiced their interest in the social, sexual and political questions, and they read them intelligently and critically.

As Flint argues, any discussion or study of reading in any period is a study of 'the meeting-place of discourses of subjectivity and socialisation'.[72] Thus a study of reading and reading matter can give insight to a personality or an individual subjectivity, or even a community, but it can also shed light on the history of that period. Reading is rarely completely disassociated from questions of authority; judgement always inflects the reading choice and by extension the reader. Any reading choice is also an opinion on one's place in society and also of the text's value. Reading theory is relevant here as the women discussed were, to a greater or lesser extent, manipulated by cultural discourses – which they were most likely to pick up through reading. The authority expressed in cultural pursuits by these women was later extended to include their move into a public sphere and they were eventually 'awarded' the authority to make judgements in other, less private spheres of society.

Conclusion

The topos of the woman reader has been shown to be of significance for this study of a particular group of women who were not only readers but cultural practitioners.

Early studies of readers, like Altick's, which do not investigate gendered reading response, are useful for their highlighting of the importance of intellectual activity on the formation of social beliefs. More recent works, which do concentrate on the gendered aspect of reading, such as Janice Radway's analyses, demonstrate that readers can utilise texts to construct communities, or regain entry to communities from which they are excluded. Connections amongst groups brought about by cultural activity are underscored in the work of reader-response, and feminist reader-response shows us those connections for groups of women. Furthermore, scholars such as Kate Flint and Elaine Showalter have recovered lost readers and writers from the historical record to emphasise reading subcultures. This notion of the subculture of women's intellectual activity is pertinent for this analysis in that it posits reading and cultural pursuits at the centre of women's interrogation of the society they live in and their negotiation of their normalised roles in that society. By acknowledging that women's reading and cultural groups formed these subcultures we can gain access to the idea of self-culture; a process of self education within a subculture that gains the subject access to the public sphere.

References:

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[1] This study will refer to the society in question as The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society. However, it was only called this post 1880: before this time it was called variously The Edinburgh Essay Society (1865), The Ladies' Edinburgh Essay Society (1865-72), The Ladies' Edinburgh Literary Society (1873-80) and The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society (1880-1935). I have chosen, when talking about the Society in general terms, to call it The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society as this is the way it is denoted in the few reference works in which it appears. There is little apparent difference discernible in the Society under its different names and it was thought that clarity should take precedence. However, when the text refers to a specific time period and the name of the Society is pertinent it will be expressed as it was at that date.

[2] *The Attempt*, 1-10 (Edinburgh: Ladies' Edinburgh Essay Society, 1865-72; Ladies' Edinburgh Literary Society, 1873-74).
The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine, 1-6 (Edinburgh: MacLaren and MacNiven, 1875-77; Edinburgh Publishing Company, 1878; Murray & Gibb, 1879; Morrison & Gibb, 1880).
National Library of Scotland, Minutes of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society, MSS 1723-33.

[3] Individual methodologies will be discussed in detail in each chapter of this thesis. However, as a broad, general rule, this study does not offer detailed diachronic analyses of matter read and studied by the women nor does it offer detailed comparisons with other similar case studies. The simple reason for this is that it was felt that as The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society is so little known to scholars of women's history or cultural production that detailed analyses of books read, articles written and topics debated would confuse the introduction of this Society to the scholarly community. Whilst, of course, there have been many discussions about various aspects of women's lives in the period discussed few have dealt with women's collective action outside the more high profile campaigns, thus comparison with other groups was complicated. My main concern in this thesis was to present this group of women to the scholarly record and to present their existence as model for discussing the 'separate spheres' discourse prevalent in this period, and to evince a better of understanding of how these women interrogated and negated their given position in society.

[4] This notion of separate spheres has been discussed at length in the field of Victorian studies. Some of the most notable works which analyse the subject are: M. J. Peterson, *Family, Love and Work in the Lives of Victorian Gentlewomen* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); Brian Harrison, *Separate Spheres: The Opposition to Women's Suffrage in Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1978); Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Hutchison, 1987); Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); *Gendered Domains: Rethinking Public and Private in Women's History: Essays from the Seventh Berkshire Conference on the History of Women*, ed. by Dorothy O. Helly and Susan M. Reverby (Itahca: Cornell University Press, 1992); *Women, Privilege and Power: British Politics, 1750 to the present*, ed. by Amanda Vickery (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[5] Lee Holcombe, *Victorian Ladies at Work: Middle-class Working Women in England and Wales, 1850-1914* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1973), p. 11.

[6] There is a full discussion of the biblical basis to the separate spheres argument in: Ellen Jordan, *The Women's Movement and Women's Employment in 19th Century Britain* (London & New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 42.

[7] Jonathan Rose, 'How Historians study reader response: or, what did Jo think of Bleak House?', in *Literature in the Marketplace: Nineteenth Century British Publishing and Reading Practices*, ed. by John Jordan and Robert Patten (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), pp. 195-212.

[8] Jonathan Rose, 'Re-reading the English Common Reader: A Preface to the History of Audiences' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 53 (1992), 47-70 (p. 48).

[9] Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1963).

[10] Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2001), p.1.

[11] *Intellectual Life of the Working Classes*, p. 1.

[12] *Intellectual Life of the Working Classes*, p. 3.

[13] Roger Chartier, *A History of Private Life, Volume 3: Passions of the Renaissance*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 125.

[14] Elizabeth Long, 'Textual Interpretation as Collective Action', in *The Ethnography of Reading*, ed. by Jonathan Boyarin (California: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 180-211.

[15] Elizabeth McHendry, 'Forgotten Readers: African American Literary Societies and the American Scene', in *Print Culture in a Diverse America*, ed. by James P. Danky and Wayne A. Wiegand (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), pp. 149-73.

[16] Long, p.191.

[17] Long, p.194.

[18] McHendry, p.152.

[19] McHendry, p.159.

[20] Barbara Caine, *Victorian Feminists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[21] Philippa Levine, *Feminist Lives in Victorian England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992).

[22] A discussion of these 'two sides' can be found in: Brian Harrison, *Separate Spheres: The Opposition to Women's Suffrage in Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1978).

[23] Kate Millett, 'The Debate Over Women: Ruskin vs. Mill', in *Suffer and be Still, Women in the Victorian Age*, ed. by Martha Vicinus (Bloomington & London: Indiana University Press, 1972), pp. 121-39.

[24] Millett, p. 121.

[25] This argument is presented in: Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920* (London: Virago Press, 1985) and is also implied in, Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement, A Reference Guide 1866-1928* (London: UCL Press, 1999) who argues for the importance of radical family and friend relationships.

[26] Caine, p.15.

[27] T.C. Smout, *A Century of the Scottish People* (London: Collins, 1986), p.292.

[28] Leah Leneman, *A Guid Cause: The Women's Suffrage Movement in Scotland* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1991).

[29] Leneman, p. 11.

[30] *The World is Ill-divided: Women's Work in Scotland in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, ed. by Eleanor Gordon and Esther Breitenbach (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990); *Out of Bounds: Women in Scottish Society, 1800-1945*, ed. by Eleanor Gordon and Esther Breitenbach (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992).

[31] Showalter, pp. 120-21.

[32] Margaret Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine 1800-1914* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

[33] Beetham, p. 175.

[34] Beetham, p. 174.

[35] Beetham, p. 174.

[36] *Victorian Women's Magazines: An Anthology*, ed. by Margaret Beetham and Kay Boardman (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

[37] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso Books, 1991).

[38] Anderson, pp. 44-45.

[39] Robert Darnton, 'What is the History of Books?', in *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990), pp. 107-36.

[40] Stanley E. Fish, 'Interpreting the Variorum', *Critical Inquiry*, 2 (1976), 465-85.

[41] Successful studies which have taken a microcosmic view of certain areas of Victorian women's lives include: Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality 1885-1914* (London: Penguin, 1995); Marysa Demoor, *Their Fair Share: Women, Power and Criticism in the* Athenaeum, *from Millicent Garrett Fawcett to Katherine Mansfield, 1870-1920* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).

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[44] Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978).

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[47] Altick, pp. 8-9.

[48] Louis James, *Fiction for the Working Man, 1830-1850. A Study of the Literature Produced for the Working Classes in Early Victorian Urban England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963).

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[52] Jenny Hartley, *Reading Groups* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[53] Radway, p. 96.

[54] Patrocinio P. Schweickart, 'Reading Ourselves: Towards a Feminist Theory of Reading' in *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts and Contexts*, ed. by Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocinio P. Schweickart (Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 35-62.

[55] Jonathan D. Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 42.

[56] Schweickart, p. 40.

[57] Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (London: Virago, 1978), *passim*.

[58] Schweickart, p. 52.

[59] Schweickart, p. 58.

[60] Annette Kolodny, 'A Map for Rereading: Or, Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts', *New Literary History*, 11 (1980): 451-67; Annette Kolodny, 'Dancing Through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice, and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism', *Feminist Studies,* 6 (1980), 1-25; Margaret Homans, 'Eliot, Wordsworth, and the Scenes of the Sister's Instruction', *Critical Inquiry*, 8 (1981): 223-41; Louise Rosenblatt, *The Reader, the Text and the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978); Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Mary Jacobus, *Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1986).

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[62] Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own.*

[63] Showalter, p. 8.

[64] Nancy F. Cott, introduction to *Root of Bitterness*, cited in Showalter, p. 14.

[65] For the best discussions of the Victorian feminine ideal, see Françoise Basch, 'Contemporary Ideologies,' in *Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel, 1837-67*, trans. by Anthony Rudolf (London: Allen Lane, 1974), pp. 3-15; Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870* (New Haven, Wellesley College Press, 1957), pp. 341-43; and Alexander Welsh's explanation of theory of the Angel in the House in *The City of Dickens* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 164-95.

[66] Christine Stansell and Johnny Faragher, 'Women and their Families on the Overland Trail, 1842-1867', *Feminist Studies* II (1975), 152-53.

[67] Sarah Ellis, *The Daughters of England*, (New York: [n. pub., 1844), p.90.

[68] Showalter, p.15.

[69] Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 10.

[70] Flint, p. 11.

[71] Flint, p. 32.

[72] Flint, p. 43.

Chapter Two - 'The awakening of woman': a background to The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society

> Starting in early Victorian days and travelling into this Neo-Georgian age, I have watched and, to a small extent shared in, what may almost be called the Awakening of Woman.[1]

This was Sarah Elizabeth Siddons Mair's comment on the Society that she had presided over for seventy years. The 'awakening' of women in middle-class Scotland during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was certainly influenced by the existence of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society. Members of the Society were active in all of the main movements for women's rights that Scotland witnessed during this period. This chapter will provide a context for a discussion of the Society through an examination of the socio-economic climate to which the members were subject. Furthermore, it will outline the genesis of the Society, focussing on the women's biographies to highlight one of the central themes of this thesis: the process of self-culture.

The first priority of the Edinburgh Essay Society when it formed was to provide a place, every Saturday morning except over the summer months, for Sarah Elizabeth Siddons Mair and her friends to discuss the books they were reading. When it began the Society was called, variously, the Edinburgh Essay Society or the Ladies' Edinburgh Essay Society. The founding members of the Society were almost certainly attendees of a Mr Hunter's classes for girls in Edinburgh. Within a few months of the Society's founding the members took to producing a magazine, firstly for their own consumption and later for wider distribution. During this time the ladies called their Society The Ladies' Edinburgh Literary Society. Still later, when the magazine ceased production in 1880, the Society became known as the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society. At this point the Society's emphasis changed, concentrating more on its debating aspect. Presided over by Mair for most of the seventy years of its duration, the Society discussed many of the pressing topics regarding women in this period; the parliamentary vote, the

higher education of women, and the right to free primary education and healthcare. During this time the focus remained broadly literary and reading informed everything that the women talked about.[2]

The Society published a monthly magazine for the first fifteen years of its existence. This foray into print production means that the earlier years of the Society are richer in evidence of reading and reading practice; due to this wealth of material for the earlier years of the Society this thesis will focus on these Victorian years. However, it is hoped that a full picture of the Society throughout its duration can be gained. A concentration on these Victorian years yields questions concerning the development and genesis of the Society. I will argue that a marked shift occurs over this time as the Society moved in interest from a largely literary society to one that exhibited a growing preoccupation with the place of women in society both social and political.

This chapter will look at the Society in detail and focus on its most prominent members. It introduces the main areas of activity of the members of the Society, which will be discussed in further detail in subsequent chapters. The context of the genesis of the Society in Victorian Edinburgh is explained. Moreover, the central argument of this thesis, that the Society facilitated a move from private sphere to public sphere for its members, is introduced.

The fact that this group of women should form a literary society, rather than any other kind, becomes clear when we consider the importance attributed to education and reading by these women and their wider society. The growth of literacy and the explosion in the numbers of books published in this period was bound to have an effect on the social lives of those most associated with these phenomena; middle-class women. This chapter will look at these women, often highly educated and in sound financial positions, and how their leisure and recreation was constructed. From manuscript and documentary sources it has been possible to identify almost all of the members of the Society and to trace their interests and activities through writing in the magazine of the Society (1865-

1880) and through the debates in which they participated. Finally, the concept of self-culture, which is central to this discussion, is explained. The aim of this chapter is to introduce the Society, contextualise its existence and to argue for its centrality and importance in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Edinburgh.

The Edinburgh Context

In the Victorian period, as it is now, Edinburgh was dominated by service industries. As a capital city it was the centre of the judiciary, administration, finance, and education. The professionals who worked in these areas made up a sizeable proportion of the workforce, 45% of all new jobs in the period between 1851 and 1911 were in the service industries. These workers and their families formed the large middle-class in Edinburgh, having their homes in the fashionable New Town area and on the environs of the city. As W. Peter Ward observes, whilst Edinburgh did have some element of heavy industry it had relatively little compared to Glasgow and Dundee, indeed in economy it more resembled the south east of England at this time.[3] Ward also comments that the importance of a service rather than a heavy industrial industry to Edinburgh's economy meant that there was a high demand for a female workforce.

As Table One (below) shows, over the period 1841 to 1921 the dynamic of the female workforce changed. In the early Victorian period most women were employed in a domestic setting, as servants and home workers, yet by the beginning of the twentieth century the largest percentage of women were working in light industry in factories.[4] Whilst in 1841 nearly 70% of the female work force in Edinburgh were employed in domestic service, by 1881 this had fallen to 50% and by the end of the First World War it had decreased again to 30%. Although this fall in women's domestic work has to be placed in the context of women's increasing diversification in the workplace and their decrease as a percentage of the workforce as a whole, it still points to a growing

professionalisation of women's work and an increase in the numbers of middle-class female workers. This is shown by the increase in the numbers of women working in commerce and the 'professional' category (which included teaching) in Table One. The growing professionalisation of women in the workplace can be seen to be concomitant with women's growing education in this period.

Occupation	1841	1861	1881	1901	1921
Professional	1.9	3.6	5.7	7.4	9.9
Domestic and Personal Service	67.4	50.8	52.1	42.5	30.1
Commercial	4.7	1.7	1.5	5.4	13.4
Clothing/Textile	17.6	29.1	17.7	17.2	10.3
Food, Tobacco, Drink, Lodgings	5.1	3.8	6.5	8.8	2.8
Paper, Print, Books	0.7	3.1	6.3	8.4	6
Other Manufacturing	2.6	5.5	8	8.4	6
Other Occupations	0.4	2.5	2.2	1.9	21.2
Total Female Workforce	10,248	31,684	36,315	53,712	70,579
%Total employment female	40.6	39	35.3	36.3	34.4

Table 1 - Edinburgh: Occupations of female workers 1841 –1921 (%)

Source: Great Britain, Census of Scotland, 1841-1921.
(Note: Occupational categories for the 1921 census are not wholly consistent with those from earlier years, particularly for some forms of manufacturing.)

Date	Scotland		England and Wales	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
1855	89	77	70	59
1860	90	78	74	64
1865	89	78	77	69
1870	90	80	80	73
1875	91	83	83	77
1880	92	85	86	81
1885	94	89	89	87
1890	96	93	93	92
1895	97	95	96	95
1900	98	97	97	97

Table 2 - Literacy of Brides and Bridegrooms, 1855-1900 (Percentage able to sign names)

Source: R. D. Anderson, *Education and the Scottish People, 1750-1918,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 305.

Table Two (above) shows that during the period in question the literacy levels of women in Scotland were increasing steadily, and were significantly higher than those in England and Wales. Although there are caveats concerning the use of marriage register

signatures to denote full literacy these statistics do give some indication of the increase in the ability to read amongst women at this time.[5] It also indicates that although there was not, until the 1870s, any legal need to educate young girls they were still being taught to read in large numbers. Further indications of literacy are found in the reports from parish ministers in *The New Statistical Account*. The majority report that almost all women and girls in their parishes could read and write, only some of the older female parishioners were reported as being illiterate.[6] This period shows young girls having increased access to a formalised education system. At this time certain philanthropic institutions set up schools for girls in Scotland. There was a school for 'Instructing girls in the elementary principles of education and teaching them needlework' in Pencaitland, East Lothian in 1850, Liberton had a girls' school set up by Mrs Trotter of Mortonhall, and in Linlithgow a Mrs Douglas established a school for 'poor girls'. More wealthy girls had the option of education by a governess or at a 'school for young ladies'. Sarah Elizabeth Siddons Mair attended history and literature classes given by a Mr Hunter in Edinburgh.[7] The 1870s saw an increase in the numbers of endowed schools in central Scotland: George Watson's Ladies' College, the Edinburgh Institute for Young Ladies, in Edinburgh; Hutcheson's Girls' School in Glasgow; and St. Leonard's School in St. Andrew's were founded in this decade.

The move from private to public

However, what these newly educated girls were to do with the rest of their lives was a subject of much debate. For the first two years of the Society the members were all single women. Indeed when the first married woman applied for membership her inclusion in the Society was put to the vote.[8] Over the duration of the Society 64% of the members were single; this is significantly higher than the percentage of unmarried women in the country as a whole (See appendix 2). Even allowing for the fact that many

of the members of the Society would have joined before marriage and therefore be denoted in the records as single this seems a noteworthy percentage. In the country as a whole, there was an exponential rise in the numbers of unmarried women. As Table Three (below) shows for the population of England and Wales, this was especially a problem for women of the middle classes.

Year	Total Number of Unmarried Women 45+	Unmarried Women 45+ as % of all women 45+	Total Number of Middle-Class Women Unmarried and 45+
1851	204,650	11.7	30,698
1861	225,183	11.2	33,777
1871	260,404	11.2	39,061
1881	292,147	11.2	48,822
1891	342,072	11.6	51,311
1901	421,549	12.4	63,232
1911	579,026	14.1	86,854
1921	788,800	15.4	118,320

Table 3: Unmarried Women over Forty-Five, 1851-1921

Source: Martha Vicinus, Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920 (London: Virago, 1985), p. 27.

Martha Vicinus argues that it was the single woman who was the catalyst for the campaign for women's rights during the Victorian period. She writes:

> The single woman necessarily took a leadership position in the effort to redefine woman's role in society. Her very lack of an ascribed role in private - she was not a mother or a wife - and in public- she was not part of the male political and social spheres - was to prove both drastically limiting and immensely liberating.[9]

Finding paid work was not a priority for many of the women in the Society, many are categorised as 'annuitants' in the census records; dependent on family or philanthropic endowments. Whilst money may have been of little consequence to these single members of the Society, the problems of finding occupations to fill the day certainly were. It can be assumed that the large numbers of single females on the roll of the Society was in consequence of this superfluous free time. The Society would provide not only a meeting

place for friends but also an occupation throughout the week as the ladies prepared for taking part in debates. For the more wealthy members of the Society the other main source of activity would be philanthropy. Women were urged to perform good works, not just for their recipients but for the good health of the women themselves. One commentator goes further to suggest that good works and service to the community were *essential* activities for the unmarried woman:

> On the ground of self-preservation, it behoves every unmarried woman to find some harmless mode of doing active service; for, if she is without it, she inevitably becomes the prey of her egotism, especially if she is exposed to the pernicious influence of a very secluded life, as certainly dangerous to spiritual health, as the miasma of standing water to the health of the body.[10]

There is evidence that some members were directly involved in setting up charitable institutions. Charitable causes feature frequently on the pages of *The Attempt* and *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine*. In Volume 6 of *The Attempt* there are three consecutive articles on The Edinburgh Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, all written by C. E. Guthrie Wright, under the *nom-de-plume* Eta.[11] The articles form a thorough report on the causes supported by the Association and the writer's attention to the machinations of the organisation suggest a personal involvement. Other charitable causes are represented by 'Nursing for the Poor' in Volume 6 of *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* and 'A Plea for Compulsory Education' in Volume 7 of *The Attempt*.[12]

However, good causes could not fill all the time available to single women. These single women of the Victorian period were constantly aware of their superfluity. The 'problem' of 'excess' women was much debated at this time, and a discussion of how the women of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society interpreted this issue will follow later in the chapter. In its basic facts the increasing number of unmarried young women meant that communities needed to be found outside the usual confines of the home and husband, and it was only natural that women should form these communities with other (*superfluous*) women. Indeed Martha Vicinus suggests that it was only natural for women

to form their own 'families' and societies when demographics meant that they were denied their more traditional roles:

> A natural reaction to the isolation of so many spinsters was to form their own communities, united by their own tasks, fulfilling social needs that could not be met by married women or by men. Independent women wanted their own space apart form the domestic world of their married sisters and from the male world in which they often moved. A community was a refuge, a foothold from which to launch into the wider world, but most of all, it was home.[13]

This idea of the community of other women acting as sanctuary prior to an entry into society is exactly the pattern seen in the actions of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society. Membership certainly fulfilled social needs for the women but it also seems to have provided the 'foothold' of which Vicinus talks, a significant number of the members of the Society went on to hold very public civic roles in wider society some years after joining the Society. Of course this link can never be categorically proved, however, the life skills that the women must have gained from being in the Society: debating; public speaking; writing for publication; being members of committees, were certainly utilised by them in the larger community.

So then, the members of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society would be aware of their status as 'superfluous' and their forming of an alternative community was in some ways a response to this. Their response suggests an understanding that the doctrine of separate spheres only complicated the population issue; whilst women were relegated to private roles they could never take on the activities that the dearth of men left empty. Retrospective discussions of the Society highlight its existence in a time of great change for women and the group's engagement with this change. In *Ladies in Debate*, an account of the Society written by a former member at the time of its disbanding, this feature is continually referred to:

> Through 70 years our Society has witnessed many changes and seen countless new movements spring into being. Seventy years ago education, compulsory and free, did not exist. There were no School Boards, no University Education for Women, no women doctors, no Jubilee Nurses, no School of Domestic Economy in Edinburgh, no Ladies' Clubs even; no woman sat on Town councils and no woman voted at parliamentary Elections or sat in Parliament. All these activities

> have been reflected in our debating society. There was scarcely any advance made by women that did not find ours a friendly stage on which to air its ideas. [14]

However, the Society was not immediately radical, and for some members it remained a pleasant occupation rather than a site of dissent. Despite Mair's precocity in the founding of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society it seems as though she was seen to be keeping well within the traditional confines of her sex and class. The Society as a whole was opposed to militancy in the women's movement and was often quiescent on the subject of women's subordination to men. In *Ladies in Debate*, to which Mair provided the foreword, the editor remarks of her:

> Yet neither was she a rebel against the established order of things as ordained by her parents and the conventions of her day and generation. But her eager, questing spirit yearned for a wider sphere than the enwrapping arms of home, and experiencing something of the music and magic of words, she longed to capture them in a tangible form, such as in the editing of a magazine for circulation among acquaintances at least, if not a wider public.[15]

Ladies in Debate stresses the importance of the family and of patriarchal tradition to the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society, and suggests that without this male-financed, nurturing and support the Society and, by extension, the debates would have ceased. Whilst it is unclear whether funds were ever directly given to the Society by fathers or husbands of the members it is certain that the women were able to utilise rooms and facilities belonging to these men:

> ...(The Society) surely owes its wholesome vitality and longevity to the pre-natal influences of its inception – the background of family tradition and history and the serenely disciplined and well-ordered family life of the household, not set on the shifting sands of restless desires and discontents, but founded on things eternal.[16]

Using this language of maternity and birth, and describing the society as 'wholesomely' vital, Rae suggests that without the paternalistic atmosphere of the family and of tradition the Society would have floundered. This is at odds with the issues discussed by the Society, which were absolutely of the moment and continually eroded preconceptions of

society and the material lives of the women involved. The debates and their outcomes also testify to the growing support for women's liberation and an interest in progress. The Edinburgh Essay Society (as it was at the time) was the first debating society in Scotland, and perhaps in Britain, to hold a debate on the contentious issue of women receiving the parliamentary vote.[17]

For some members the chief benefit of the Society was its cultural, rather than radical, discussions. Recoiling from the turbulence of the political arena, Mrs Arnott preferred to discuss literature and reading with her fellow members of the society:

> Looking back over the years it is difficult to keep one's impressions distinct, but I seem to remember that in the early years of my membership we had more debates on literary subjects – Literature, History, Travel, Music, Architecture, Painting – and fewer on social subjects, but perhaps this is because my own special interests lay there. Many exceptional debates come back to mind on such subjects as Jane Austen, Charles Lamb, Victorian Novelists, George Eliot, Meredith, Pepys and the Navy, Frederick the Great, Wordsworth, Shelley, Napoleon, where the speaking was of high level and the debating power considerable.[18]

Interestingly, as Mrs Arnott demonstrates, the Society was able to accommodate all its members' needs. From her testimony Mrs Arnott seems to be anti-suffragist or at least to be uninterested in the debate, whereas other members appear to be active in the suffrage and women's rights movements in Edinburgh. Some members had a fixed agenda in joining the Society. Mrs Stitt, another member, remembered:

> ... three things were especially looked forward to, these being interesting information, perhaps some amusement, and (more hopefully) some secondary education much required by the imperfectly educated product of a bygone Ladies' School.[19]

Despite much of the quiescent nature of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society, its roots in a patriarchal value structure and its distaste of any direct action to gain women's rights, it was continually aware of events in the 'women's sphere' and these events found their way into the monthly debates. The marginalisation of women at the time of the genesis of the Society was little debated, but as the Society grew older and women began to come to the fore in political debates the members did embrace many of

the tenets of the 'New Woman'. Even in 1911 there was much to be done to achieve equality, as one former member wrote:

> Might not society have reached a riper development, human nature a fairer stature, if women, half the race, had not been persistently coerced and repressed? This, at any rate, history surely proves, that there is a certain loss and possible danger in repression, and, further that human qualities in the character and personality of woman – which are independent of the sex functions that differentiate her from man – naturally claim expression; and lastly, that the more frankly Nature has been trusted, and free play given to the individual the happier and better have been the results both for women themselves and for Society, and ultimately, therefore for the State, thus enriched by the service contributed by women to the common weal. Through the fullest self-development in each of its members the State attains its highest embodiment. The realisation of this great ideal lies yet in the far future.[20]

Members' Biographies

Over 600 women became members of the Society over its seventy year duration, and according to the minute books, membership most commonly stood around the one hundred mark.[21] The members were, judging by their postal addresses, of the upper-middle classes inhabiting the fashionable New Town of Edinburgh. Towards the end of the life of the Society there is a marked increase in the number of titled members; from 1865-1883 all the members are listed either as 'Miss' or more infrequently as 'Mrs', later in addition thirteen 'Ladies', one 'Countess' and two 'Drs' became members. Not all members attended debates and meetings of the Society; no more than a core of about thirty are named as being present at the voting stage of the debates. Other members were obviously linked to the Society through correspondence alone as they are noted as living outside a travelling distance of Edinburgh. There seems to have been a hierarchy of sorts at the Saturday meetings of the Society. It is reported in *Ladies in Debate* that there was an inner sanctum of office bearers and debaters who were allowed to sit at the dining-table of 5 Chester Street. Other members, who must have participated at least in questions and comments after the debates, were relegated to a row of chairs around the wall of the room. However, the intention was to run the Society along democratic lines. Decisions

about the future of the magazine, for instance, were put to the vote and the answer delayed so that the votes of the corresponding members of the Society could be included. These silent members (only a third of members listed in appendix 2 ever participated directly in a debate) were necessary and important then. And indeed, they must have gained something from the Society to remain members (or even to join) without intending to contribute.

Some of the women's personal biographies are emblematic of the shift from private to public that is reflected in the Society as a whole. Of course, as the majority of the member's of the Society's lives have been lost from the historical record these biographies show a partial and skewed narrative of the average member of the Society. Though they may have participated in the quest for higher education for women, in philanthropic campaigns or the suffrage crusade, unless their names were included as committee members on publicly published documents then their participation is invisible to the modern-day scholar. It is hoped that the printing of the names and addresses of all the members of the Society as an appendix to this thesis will assist future scholars in unearthing these members from the silence of the historical record. The women who are visible in the historical record were involved in two main areas of activity: campaigning for social inclusion in its various guises, or as writers of published works. The first group shows diverse interest in the campaigns of the day, it was unusual (and in this group, unheard of) for women to be single-issue campaigners. Those who were interested in extending the vote to woman were, almost always, also interested in her increased access to education and the world of work.

Researching these women's biographies is an intrinsic part of this thesis. In recovering their literary and debating voices we can only go some way towards their installation in a history of audiences. To assess their biographies alongside their textual production and their discussion topics is to give a more holistic picture of these women's lives and motivation. To this end a list of biographical details of the more prominent

members of the Society is included in appendix 3. Of course there are caveats associated with the reconstruction of the lives of historical figures. Any material in the historical record can only give a partial view of these women's lives and there are few modern mentions of them in discussions of Victorian women, or Edinburgh society. Not withstanding that the resources are often partial and sketchy, their setting down in this thesis can at least point future scholars to their existence and lead to further, more detailed work on individual lives.

Certainly, the most prominent member of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society was Sarah Elizabeth Siddons Mair. The Society was always closely linked with the life of its president; it adjourned for the summer when she took a break from Edinburgh, and in 1936 when Mair was a nonagenarian the Society disbanded, presumably because without her force as leader it could not continue. Mair is perhaps emblematic of a class of girls and young women who came from privileged backgrounds. Her father was a military man, and she would have received a quality education without the introduction of a universal education system. However, her intellect was indulged in a public and beneficial manner; by organising the Society and hosting it at her father's house, Mair provided a forum and mutual support for women like her who had no place to air their views in society. Mair was known for her love of learning and reading from her earliest years, 'We read, but Sally studies' said her sister. At an early age she displayed a love of literature over 'fiction' that was to characterise many of her views expressed in later writings.[22]

Sarah Elizabeth Siddons Mair's family was no stranger to public life. Her great-grandmother was Sarah Siddons (1755-1831) the celebrated English actress. Siddons' name would still have resonance in Edinburgh where her great-granddaughter grew up. In his 1872 autobiography the publisher Robert Chambers remembered her visit to Edinburgh:

> The furor created in the town by the performances of this illustrious lady was extraordinary. Prodigious crowds attended hours before the performance for the chance of a place. It came to be necessary to admit them at three, and then people began to attend at twelve to get in at three. The General Assembly of the church, in session at the time, found it necessary to arrange their meetings with some reference to the hours at the theatre, for the younger members had discovered that attendance on Mrs Siddon's performances was calculated to be of some advantage to them, as a means of improving their elocution. People came from distant places, even from Newcastle, to witness what all spoke of with wonder. There were one day applications for 2557 places, while there were only 630 of that kind in the house.[23]

When the Mair family lost money in railway shares, Elizabeth, Sarah's mother gave Shakespeare recitals, in the manner of her grandmother, to raise the family finances. Sarah later stated: 'As children we were literally fed and clothed on Shakespeare'.[24]

Mair founded the Society in 1865 at the age of nineteen. *Ladies in Debate* records that Mair discussed the formation of the Society with her father before its foundation, and that, meetings 'were held with cordial parental approval'.[25] This parental sanctioning for the Society is not surprising and it is noted that, although never a member of the Society, Sarah's mother was often present in its early years. At the age of twenty-two Mair was one of the seven founders of the Ladies' Edinburgh Educational Association (later the Edinburgh Association for the University Education of Women) and was subsequently involved with the foundation of the St. George's Training School and St. George's School for Girls in Edinburgh. Throughout her life she was interested in the extension of suffrage to women. Although she was not a signatory to the 1866 petition for women's suffrage she seems to have been involved in every movement for the extension of women's parliamentary rights from this date. She was an early member of the Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage and spoke at the Grand Demonstration in favour of women's suffrage held in Edinburgh in March 1884. She signed the Declaration in Favour of Women's Suffrage in 1889, compiled by the Central Committee of the National Society for Women's Suffrage. In that same year she is listed as a member of the executive committee of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. She became president of the Edinburgh Society after the death of Priscilla Bright MacLaren in 1906.

By 1910 she was also president of the Scottish Federation of the NUWSS. The first monthly meeting of the Northern Men's Federation for Women's Suffrage was held in Mair's house in October 1913.

With Elsie Inglis, S.E.S. Mair suggested that the Scottish Federation of the NUWSS should set up a hospital unit, staffed by women, to help on the frontline of the First World War. This proposal eventually led to the formation of the Scottish Women's Hospitals, and Mair became president of the Scottish Women's Hospital Committee whilst Inglis organised the effort on the frontline.[26] In honour of this achievement she was made a member of the Order of St Sava (Serbia), Class IV at the end of the war. She was also made a Dame of the British Empire and given an honorary doctorate by Edinburgh University. In 1934 she was honorary president of the Edinburgh National Society for Equal Citizenship and a vice-president of the National Council for Equal Citizenship. Mair's home, firstly at 29 Abercromby Place then at 5 Chester Street, was also the home of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society for the length of its duration, and was the site of much of the campaigning for women's rights and welfare in Edinburgh in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[27]

Two later members of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society, whose lives had a similar trajectory to Mair's, are Louisa and Flora Stevenson. Louisa, born in 1835 focussed her campaigning on the extension of medical education but her work extended to many other movements and she was a full member of several committees. Louisa Stevenson's name is associated with education in Edinburgh, she worked towards the opening of the Scottish Universities to women and was instrumental in initiating the 'University Classes scheme' which is discussed in fuller detail in Chapter 5. She was one of the two first elected members of the Parochial Board, which corresponds to the Board of Guardians in England.[28] Other avenues of Edinburgh life benefited from her campaigning vigour: she was a keen suffrage supporter and a patron of both the Jubilee Nurses and Edinburgh Infirmary. Her biography (possibly written by the Stevenson

sisters' nieces) drew attention to her skill and persuasion as a public speaker and her knowledge of business and finance matters that made her welcome on boards and committees (in spite of her sex). When Queen Margaret College built its new premises in 1970 in Corstorphine, Edinburgh, it named a student residence (now a teaching block) in Louisa Stevenson's memory.

Louisa's sister, Flora Stevenson, led an equally public life. Born in 1839, she too was motivated by the need for education for Scotland's women and girls. Flora was elected to the first Edinburgh School Board in 1873 and was subsequently re-elected for a total of 33 years until her death, when she was Chairman of the Board. It was her work on the School Board in Edinburgh that overcame much opposition to women holding such posts. Her other educational activities included being a representative of the Edinburgh Educational Trust and Governor of George Heriot's School Trust. Her interest in education was recognised by the fact that the Board School at Comely Bank, Edinburgh was named the Flora Stevenson School in her memory. Like her sister she was also a member of various social and philanthropic movements and groups. In 1903 Edinburgh University awarded her the honorary degree, LLD, in recognition of her work in education, and in 1905 she was awarded freedom of the City of Edinburgh.[29]

One member of the Society who had already established her campaigning credentials before joining was Eliza Wigham. Born into a Quaker family in Edinburgh in 1820 Eliza Wigham spent much of her life working for various philanthropic causes. At the age of twenty Wigham attended the world's anti-slavery convention in London and on her return became the secretary of the Edinburgh Ladies' Emancipation Society which campaigned for abolition. In 1863 she published *The Anti-Slavery Cause in America and its Martyrs*.[30] She was also involved in the suffrage movement; being a member of both the executive committee of the National Society for Women's Suffrage and the Edinburgh National Women's Suffrage Society. In 1869 she signed a petition against the Contagious

Diseases Acts. In Edinburgh she ran a Penny Savings Bank from 1859 until her death in 1899. Wigham was also known as a keen supporter of the Temperance Movement.[31]

Charlotte Carmichael was one of the founder members of the Ladies' Edinburgh Essay Society. She came from an enviable Edinburgh lineage; one great-grandfather had helped to design Edinburgh's New Town, and her father was the landscape painter, J.F. Carmichael.[32] Charlotte Carmichael was the first woman in Scotland to take a university certificate. In 1879 she married Henry Stopes, a respected scientist, antiquarian and geologist. Interestingly, at their marriage Charlotte was eleven years older than her husband, and at thirty-nine significantly older than the average age for marriage in this period. Their daughter, Marie Carmichael Stopes, pioneer of birth control, was born in 1881. It is likely that Charlotte Stopes' feminist belief was galvanised by her experiences as an early female student at Edinburgh University, where she was not allowed to attend lectures. She is best remembered for her suffragist work, *British Freewomen*, which discusses British women's achievements throughout history and suggests that there is an historical precedent for women's suffrage.[33] The book was well received and was printed in several editions, however for some women's rights campaigners it did not go far enough. In May, having read the book Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy wrote to Harriet McIlquham that Mrs Stopes:

> Seems to be either wholly ignorant of - or deliberately to ignore the immense changes of position of the married women effected by the M.W.P. [married women's property] Acts - the Clitheroe judgement - recent judicial decisions (Markham and Prentice) as to voting rights and the L.G. [local government] Bill of Last Session.... I wish you could see Mrs Stopes and talk the whole thing over with her. Surely she cannot seriously propose this [enfranchisement for widows and spinsters only].[34]

Stopes went on to publish material in favour of female suffrage and her growing interest and militancy is evident from her writing. In 1897 she published a pamphlet, *Women's Suffrage in the Queen's Year* originally printed in the *Humanitarian. The Sphere of 'Man' in Relation to That of 'Woman' in the Constitution* was published by T. Fisher Unwin in 1907 and in 1908 she wrote *The Constitutional Basis of Women's Suffrage*. This was

published in the *Fortnightly Review* in September 1908 and then republished as a 15-page pamphlet by the Darien Press in Edinburgh. *The Constitutional Basis of Women's Suffrage* argued for the use of militant methods in the fight for women's enfranchisement, a far cry from the arguments espoused in *British Freewomen*. Indeed it is suggested by Elizabeth Crawford that Stopes had some links with the militant Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), speaking from a platform at the June 1908 Hyde Park Rally.[35]

Her experiences in the Ladies' Edinburgh Essay and Literary Society clearly had influence over Charlotte Stopes after her move to London. Two months after their arrival, she had set up a Shakespeare Reading Society, a Logic Class and the Upper Norwood Discussion Society.[36] The writing activities, which she began in *The Attempt*, were also continued when she moved to London. From 1888 she wrote for the *Rational Dress Gazette*, which was edited by Constance Wilde. In 1896 she joined the staff of *The Athenaeum*, becoming their specialist on Shakespeare.[37] In turn, she also introduced her daughter, Marie, to writing for the weekly; she joined the staff in 1904 and wrote on scientific topics until the beginning of the First World War. Alongside this periodical writing Charlotte Stopes also authored over twenty books, mainly on Shakespeare and his milieu.

Of the other members of the Society many were influential names in various fields. Most notably the areas of education, literature, and philanthropy attracted members of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society. A list of these prominent members and their activities can be found in appendix 3. These women, and their activities and interests, are emblematic of the class of women discussed in this thesis. Their activities are in both the private and public sphere; indeed they call into question the concept of spheres altogether.

Perhaps it is understandable, given the ladies' interest in education, that so many of the members would be involved in that field. Dame Louisa Innes Lumsden was not only an established writer and educator, she was head teacher of St. Leonard's Girls School in St Andrews, but also very active in the suffrage movement (although she too was against

any direct action on the behalf of women's emancipation). Mrs Mary Walker became the first headmistress of St George's School in Edinburgh, which instigated by members of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society. Miss C. E. Guthrie Wright founded the School of Domestic Economy in Edinburgh (now Queen Margaret University College) demonstrating that so-called 'womanly work' was of such importance that it should be taught and mastered in a college setting.

Others were involved in the Arts; Rosaline Masson, daughter of Professor Masson who was instrumental in the inclusion of women at Edinburgh University, wrote twenty-six books including some celebrated translations; Mrs Henry Cadell was the wife of the President of the Royal Scottish Society for the Arts, and Lady Margaret Sackville wrote thirty-nine books and her poetry was well-known in the nineteenth century. The publishing experiences of the members of the Society are discussed more fully in Chapter 6 and a list of their published works can be found in appendix 6.

Whilst it must be surmised that the members of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society were involved in philanthropy, due to their reference to good works in debates and in the magazines, it is perhaps by its very nature that it is difficult to find direct reference to participants in this field. Many were members of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science which at least indicates an interest in matters of social betterment, if not actual participation in the cause. Miss Mary Lees, a long-term member of the Society, was involved in the administration of the Poor Law and had links with the Temperance Movement. Chrystal Macmillan was, amongst other things, known for her pacifism. Church work was obviously a major factor in any Victorian philanthropy; Miss Helen C. Reid, the first co-editor of *The Attempt*, worked for the Church of Scotland's medical mission.

Self Culture

There is a recurrence of the theme of 'self-culture' in magazines of the Edinburgh Ladies' Debating Society. Self-culture consists of a duty to fill one's time profitably – not to be idle even when the women addressed were not employed in any specific line of work. This relates to why the women were members of the Debating Society, they felt a need, if not a duty, to use their lives to best result, improving and educating themselves. There is some correlation between these women, then, and the 'self-made' men of a slightly earlier period, autodidacts who, without any recourse to formal education, taught themselves, not for any definable purpose but simply for the joy of 'knowing'. Alongside this conception of self-culture is the doctrine that any reading must be part of a systematic programme of study. The concept of the self-cultured woman is a useful paradigm for looking at the Victorian middle-class women's movement. It begins to question loaded terms such as spheres and acknowledges that the Victorian movement, whilst not as prolific or militant as later women's campaigns, was revolutionary for its time and centred on the middle-classes.

This thesis devotes three main chapters to the main sites of activity for the members of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society: debating, magazine production, and education provision. The final chapter discusses the ladies' forays into a more public life and includes discussions of the importance of club life; writing for publication; religious worship; working women; and the suffrage campaign. The effects of this process of Self-Culture permeate any discussion of the women's activities and it is hoped that this concept may be helpful to future studies of the intellectual lives of the women of the Victorian middle-classes.

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[2] A full list of subjects debated is included as an appendix to this thesis (appendix 1).

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[6] Rosalind K. Marshall, *Virgins and Viragos: A History of Women in Scotland from 1080 to 1980* (London: Collins, 1983), p. 253.

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[13] Vicinus, p. 31.

[14] Rae, p. 8.

[15] Rae, p. 16.

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[17] There is a fuller discussion of the women's involvement in the suffrage question in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

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[30] Eliza Wigham, *The Anti-Slavery Cause in America and its Martyrs* (London: [n. pub.], 1863).

[31] Crawford, p. 708. Other information on Eliza Wigham can be found in: *Eliza Wigham (A brief memorial. Reprinted and revised from the 'Annual Monitor')* (London: [n. pub.], 1901); and *Farewell meeting for presentation of an address of sympathy and regret to Eliza Wigham on the occasion of her leaving Edinburgh, 20th April, 1898* (Edinburgh: [n. pub.], 1898).

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[33] Charlotte Carmichael Stopes, *British Freewomen - Their Historical Privilege* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1884).

[34] Crawford, pp. 656-57.

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[36] Hall, p. 18.

[37] Marysa Demoor, *Their Fair Share: Women, Power and Criticism in the ATHENAEUM, From Millicent Garrett Fawcett to Katherine Mansfield, 1870-1920* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), p. 30, p. 113.

Chapter Three - Recovering women's voices: the debating aspect of the Society

Debates were the main feature of the monthly meetings of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society, from its founding in 1865 to its disbanding in 1935. Whilst in the earlier years of the Society members may have been more interested and excited by their publishing projects, *The Attempt* and *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine*, and in the later years with their membership of committees and boards concerned with social and political reform, the debating aspect of their Society was ever present. This chapter will assess the importance accorded to the debates by the members of the Society and will chart the development of subjects and themes throughout the Society's duration. It will show the relevance of the speaking-in-public aspect of a debating society to the progression of women's rights and a general move from the private to the public sphere. The chapter will have two main focuses: a macro and a microcosmic discussion of the role of debating in the lives of these women. The macrocosmic consideration will assess the structuring, and eventual professionalisation of ideas and beliefs through the medium of debating; how the women emulated more 'public' debating societies and ultimately took the convictions that they had consolidated in the debating Society into the wider arena of public life. This consideration will begin by placing the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society within the context of other ladies' societies, charting the parallels and dissonance between the different organisations. Succeeding this a microcosmic consideration will show how individual women developed through their involvement in debating. This section will recreate the evolution of ideas amongst individual women by charting their voting patterns and their subjects of debate within the Society.

Through the use of voice in both private and public forums the members of the debating society were disrupting conventions that had existed for centuries. The early Victorian period with its overriding doctrine of separate spheres in the middle and upper classes both disparaged and disallowed the feminine speaking subject. This trope is most

easily seen in a character such as Dinah Morris in George Eliot's *Adam Bede*. As a woman who speaks in public Dinah is both ridiculed and admonished. Many speakers on the suffrage platform were to meet the same fate in the early twentieth century.

The debating society, first by allowing women to speak in the relatively private forum of the women's society, then by taking those debates outside into campaigns for social and political justice, broke the social norms set for women's speech. Voice and debate gave women a new cultural authority that had been previously denied them. As Kahane and Dunn & Jones argue this speaking subject was represented in the women's literature produced in the later nineteenth century and emblematic of the concept of the New Woman which became a cultural phenomenon in the last decade of that century.[1] Charlotte Yonge, who wrote for *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine*, was one such writer that realised the disruptive effect of women's voices. In her novel *The Three Brides* one (female) character says of another who has spoken to a mixed public crowd:

> She should have instructed some other gentleman. [to speak for her] A woman spoils all the effect of her doings by putting herself out of her proper place...The woman has much power of working usefully and gaining information, but the one thing that is not required of her is to come forward in public ... the delicate edges of true womanhood ought not to be frayed off by exposure in public.[2]

As Philippa Levine, in her book *Feminist Lives in Victorian England*, has pointed out there has been a tendency amongst historians to concentrate on Victorian feminists' public works, leaving a lack of emphasis upon how their feminism galvanised their ordinary, everyday private lives.[3] This scholarly emphasis on the feminist campaigns rather than the women themselves is understandable; by the very fact of their acts being public they are more likely to be recorded and archived. There is often simply no material to reconstruct how the public and private spheres of these women interacted. However, by ignoring or not considering their private lives scholars reinforce what would, in post-structuralist terms, be a restrictive binary opposition. By concentrating on the public personae of early feminists and on movements rather than people, scholars re-enact the

controlling mechanisms that these women were trying to dissolve. The members of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society, and other societies like it, were involved not so much in pushing their way into the public domain but in fusing the two sites of discourse into one. By discussing politics, law, arts and education in their private meetings and campaigning for the suffrage, higher education and better rights for the poor in the public eye they give the lie to the idea that women were confined to *spheres* of influence.

Characterising the private sphere as somehow female, and the public sphere as male and suggesting that these women moved from one to the other goes some way to theorising the decisions that they made. However, this simplistic view is only partial. Certainly there was some movement from the private to the public, but more importantly there was erosion of these terms altogether. In fact it would be true to say that these women in their debates and in their campaigns sought to make these spheres dissolve and have no meaning. They did not simply want to enter the 'male world' of work and study and civic life, they felt that the domestic was just as crucial as the public and wanted to prioritise individual value whatever its *sphere*.

Comparisons with other women's societies

Although The Ladies' Institute was a curiosity when Bessie Rayner Parkes and Barbara Bodichon opened it in 1860 by the end of the nineteenth century women's clubs and societies were commonplace. The following was written for *The Lady's Realm* in 1898:

> The multiplying of women's clubs, and the accompanying facilities for social intercourse, is distinctly a latter-day feature of London society. Twenty years ago they were practically unknown: today they are to be met with on all sides. They are a sign of the times; women have awakened to the fact that they want something outside their domestic and home duties.[4]

Philippa Levine suggests that the network of social and political crusades with which early feminists were concerned forged more social ties between the women; and that this led to their formation of clubs and societies where they could meet to discuss their campaigning. Indeed the societies that she mentions, The Kensington Society, The Langham Place Group and The Pioneer Club all seem to have been founded in such a way. The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society is interesting in that it had a social nexus long before it had any political overtones. In fact it never had any party political affiliation and was political only in that it believed in the general idea of the 'furthering of women'. The campaigns with which its members were involved were almost wholly ancillary to the Society itself. Although we can only assume that as so many members were involved in campaigning groups they must have organised and met through contacts made in the meetings of the Society. Despite the difference in origins of these Societies they do have common themes and interests. The more well known London-based clubs have significant parallels with the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society, not least because of its members' similar and allied campaigns. None of these Societies were single-issue campaigning groups. They all had a social side and an interest in at least a couple of the main issues that women were involved with in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Most of the women discussed chose to support a number of campaigns and offered financial backing or grassroots support to several areas of protest. Most commonly the campaigns were centred around a few different but connected issues: women's parliamentary suffrage, the campaign for higher education, the extension of married women's legal rights and the increase of opportunity for women in the work place. Women like The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society's president, S.E.S. Mair, would be involved in all four, plus supporting religious missions and campaigning for the improvement of the conditions of the poor. The sheer amount of these commitments, both in terms of money and of time, show the strength of the embryonic movement and its promise to improve the lives of women on all fronts.

The extent of these women's commitment to social and political reform lends importance to the form of their meetings and discussions in a social context. The society or club formed an important role in that it was the site of free discussion amongst the women and a place where they could formulate and test their views in a supportive environment. Alongside this, the women were able to formulate a network of social connections which would not only help them in their campaigning lives but also bolster them for the work in hand. The clubs offered a training ground but more importantly they offered a web of women who were engaged in the same struggle. Like the Edinburgh Society the London ones had an impressive roll call of prominent feminist names but they must have also fostered the support of the 'foot soldiers' of the campaigns; women who have been lost to history but contributed a substantial effort towards reform. As will be shown, The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society was perhaps unique in these societies in that it was able to incorporate and contain many differing views within its membership; anti-suffragist was able to sit next to a suffragette, Liberal next to Tory. This aspect of the Society is perhaps indicative of its success and longevity. The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society carried on long after the London clubs had closed their doors.

Early women's campaigns centred around the Langham Place group and from that coterie emerged several women's societies. The first of these proto-feminist London societies was the Kensington also known as the Kensington Ladies' Discussion Society. It was established in 1865 as a discussion group by Charlotte Manning and was instigated by the social group that had been involved in the opening of the Local Examinations to women. Emily Davies, founder of Girton College, was an early member, as were the medical women Elizabeth Garrett and Sophia Jex-Blake, and later to be prominent feminists, Emilie Gurney, Helen Taylor (adopted daughter of John Stuart Mill), Frances Power Cobbe, Jessie Boucherett, Dorothea Beale and Elizabeth Wolstenholme. The topics discussed, suffrage, education, the servant question, were very similar to those discussed in Edinburgh at the same time. It was more radical in nature and formed a

suffrage committee, which drew up a petition that was presented to parliament by John Stuart Mill. After the bill failed the committee dissolved. In its time The Langham Place Circle had most of the prominent feminists of the day as its members. It is seen by many as being the seedbed of the feminist movement in Britain. However, as well as having this strong campaigning element, it did foster the same social connections that the Kensington Society had and the Edinburgh Debating Society continued to do.

Throughout this later part of the nineteenth century many clubs and groups sprang up around London and the major cities. Some of these clubs simply provided a place to meet and to leave shopping whilst in town, others organised debates and lectures, most were fairly short-lived. By the end of the century the existence of clubs was well established, even if individual names came and went. When in 1899 London hosted the International Congress of Women three of the secretaries of the most prominent clubs were on the hospitality committee: Miss Kerr of the Sommerville Club, Miss Johnson of the New Victoria Club and Miss Routledge of the Writer's Club.

Another London society of note to form was the Pioneer Club. Established in 1892 by Emily Massingberd it intended, as one can ascertain by its name, to force change in the lives of women by encouraging advanced views. Interestingly, it also hoped to encourage women to 'separate personal friendships from matters of principle'.[5] Its speakers included those from what might be called the second-wave of Victorian feminism who would later be called suffragists and suffragettes. Millicent Garret Fawcett, Clementia Black, Annie Hicks and George Bernard Shaw all addressed meetings. Although the club did not have its own magazine or journal its meetings were advertised in *Shafts*. By December 1893 in a report in *Shafts* the club was said to number 320 members.[6] The club is written about in terms similar to those used to describe the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society, it is figured as both a training school and a place of social interaction:

> It is quite an exceptional club, and in the full spirit of progress; progress that sweeps not away, nor destroys, save that is unworthy of and destructive to all healthy life. The influence of the members upon each other, from the able president – whose task so gracefully and pleasantly discharged is a labour of love – to the youngest and most recent addition to the rapidly increasing list, is an educative one, a strengthening, and refining one. The debates are well attended and entered into with zest and ardour; the afternoon meetings, the at-homes, are all full of happy intercourse and attrition of mind, which cannot fail to be powerful in its results.[7]

The rhetoric used to describe the club, which although unsigned was most likely written by a member if not the president, attempts to blend the private and the public just as the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society positioned itself. The women are characterised as pioneers who still enjoy the Victorian domestic diversion the 'at-home'; the public and the private are forced to live side by side. Later in the piece the writer suggests that:

> These Pioneers have resolved to destroy the distinctions of sex and class; their club is unique in its force and strength; its friendly intercourse and enjoyment; and its home-like retirement and repose, so freely shared in by all.

This statement is significant. The club's members figure as 'destroyers' with 'force and strength' whilst being 'friendly' and able to enjoy the domestic comforts that the club can offer. Finally, they are democratic; the club's unique gifts are 'freely shared in by all'. The Pioneers faced the same choices that feminists groups have encountered in this century; whether to appear 'soft' or 'hard'. It is evident that faced with this choice The Pioneers chose to combine all elements the public and private, the soft and hard, the domestic and the pioneering woman. The advanced use of rhetoric employed in this article in *Shafts,* a magazine that championed the causes of both working classes and women and was therefore sympathetic, suggest that the club had prepared itself for some stiff opposition. By being a women-centred organisation and by being overtly political they evidently met with hostility and ridicule. In a curious final paragraph the writer acknowledges this opposition and uses the imagery of Britannia to counter the attacks:

> Slander, whose venomous tongue, though somewhat paralysed by the attitude of the nineteenth century woman, is to yet be silenced, cast his javelins about, touching fiercely all places where women gather, all efforts they make; hurling

> his darts no doubt at this centre equally with the others. But erect and unmoved stands the Pioneer, her face like the sea foam, in its purity and strength, her feet firm in the faith of those who gather round, undaunted amid the roar of tongues. So let truth betide her, for she is free, and so remaining and holding her undismayed front to the foe, 'no weapon that is formed against her shall prosper'.

Borderlands

The position taken by some of these later debating societies and by the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society in combining the public and private aspects of their lives is best described by the psychoanalytical term 'Borderlands'. Borderlands are those liminal areas, between censure and approval, where the subject can have free reign. Ellen Jordan has suggested that feminist women were able to negotiate the problem of separate spheres through such places as clubs and societies, and other social institutions, which could still be characterised as 'private'.[8] Building on Anne Digby's suggestion that women could exploit these sites of intermingling between public and private, Jordan argues that women who wished to pass into a more public role could elide the binary oppositions that subjugated them.[9] Thus women utilised these 'borderlands', liminal areas of public life, which were regarded as being adequately 'private' to allow women participants. These areas, the church, education, philanthropy, and the practice of writing could be utilised by women, as approximation of the public sphere. The meeting of the Society was just such a Borderland.

Another instance of the borderland concept is expressed in the fact that these societies provided a 'training' function for many of their members. This 'training' purpose is perhaps most noticeable in the realm of public speaking. Public speaking could be performed in a private place. The early Victorian period allowed very little scope for women to speak and be heard by any kind of audience. Women were not seen in any kind of parliamentary function, nor in trades unions or on the boards of municipal bodies such as schools or hospitals. In general the middle and upper class home provided few opportunities for any extended discussions and women were expected to retire from any

serious debates held over dinner or in company. Thus a privately held debating society which admitted only women offered a unique opportunity for speaking and listening in a supportive environment. Many of the women who are quoted in *Ladies in Debate*, the official account of the society, expressed disquiet and even fear about the speaking aspect of the Society's business.[10] However the training they received, most often by example, equipped many of the women for positions in public life in the later Victorian period. The president of the Society, Sarah Siddons Mair, is portrayed as being an excellent speaker, indeed her power of voice and of persuasion are mentioned as her principal characteristics:

> Herself an accomplished and eloquent speaker, gifted beyond the ordinary with a musical voice of rare timbre and cadence and a perfect self-possession and poise of manner and address, both on the public platform and in private, Sarah Siddons Mair had infinite understanding and patience with those not thus endowed and could inspire confidence in the shyest and most awkward of what might truly be called 'maiden speakers'.[11]

The confidence that she was able to inspire is evident in the future careers of those who attended her 'training school'.

Alongside a discussion of the subjects that the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society chose to debate must be a consideration of the women as speaking women, adopting rhetorical devices and using their voices to effect change. Some theorists of women's history have pointed to the important of voice in the development of the women's movement. Claire Kahane suggests that 'both a disquieting internal image and an external social reality, the figure of the speaking woman had a profoundly unsettling effect on nineteenth century cultural discourse'.[12] This 'unsettling effect' was initiated by the sea change that allowed women's voices to be heard in public. Indeed even the most prominent women speakers of the late nineteenth century were unsure of their voices at the beginnings of their careers. At the first meetings of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Sciences in 1856-8 the Langham Place women had men read their papers for them but by 1859 they were reading them themselves.

There have been several sustained discussions of early feminist rhetoric, perhaps most notably, Karlyn Kors Campbell's study *Men Cannot Speak for Her.*[13] Although this study focuses on American feminists it has implications for those women who, though perhaps not from a consciously feminist arena, were engaging in public speaking in the mid Victorian period. Campbell discusses the dichotomy between women having no rhetorical tradition within which to work and having to adopt the rules and regulations of the male practice of public articulation, which they were trying to supersede. This tension between the male tradition and the novelty of women's speech in the Victorian period is seen in the legislative machinations of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society. The minute books for the Society are full of lists of rules and motions for adapting those rules. The reporting and regulating of debates was clearly an important feature of their Saturday morning meetings. Unfortunately few reminiscences of the quality of voice of ordinary members of the Society exist in the historical record. We have no indication of the timbre, clarity and enunciation of voice by these women, save that of Sarah Siddons Mair. However, Rae in *Ladies in Debate* does report that:

> More than one woman in public life today owes, not only her position, but the fact that it is possible for her to hear the sound of her own voice raised on the pubic platform with qualms of *mauvais honte* to the gracious encouragement and subtle sympathy of Sarah Siddons Mair, always 'the mirror of all courtesy'.[14]

Speech-making and debating was able to articulate the borderlands which these women encountered, enabling them to give voice to their ambivalent feelings about entering a sphere that was not their own.

The Debating Aspect of the Society

Despite the importance of the publishing aspect of the early years of the Society, it was, at heart, a debating society. Debates were the focus of the monthly meetings and each woman was expected to contribute to at least one debate. The fact that the members of the society were cognisant of the subjects of debate several months in advance meant

that the Society's auspices spilled out into the rest of their lives. The writing of speeches and compiling of opinions and responses would have been a serious time commitment. For those members who regularly contributed to the debates, membership of the Society would have been a large feature of their lives. As can be seen from appendix 1, certain of the women were prolific speakers and debaters, contributing to scores of debates throughout the Society's duration. This discussion will now turn to the importance accorded to joining and participating in the Society in the lives of these women. It is also necessary to analyse the progression of the Society, its maturation and development in order to arrive at the implications of being a debating member.

After the women ceased printing and publishing *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* in 1880 the main focus of the Society's meetings were the debates. At this point in the minute books there are many recorded discussions concerning how the debates are to be co-ordinated. By mid 1883 the minutes show not only the title of debate and those that spoke for or against, but also the content of the speeches and comments from the floor by those not taking part directly. At this point new rules were drawn up. These rules, which are worth quoting in their entirety, show the extent to which the women wanted to regulate the debates and to keep them to a fixed format.

1. There should be honorary members, not more than twenty at a time, who on payment of a double subscription (5/-) should be exempt from opening debates.
2. That the time for arranging the Debate in the ordinary way, shall henceforth not exceed ten minutes.
3. That in default of voluntary speakers the president shall (after ten minutes have elapsed) call upon the ordinary members in turn to provide for the opening of the Debate by speaking or writing. (Lots shall be drawn to decide upon the speakers.)
4. That any member so called upon must take the part assigned – or pay a fine of 2/6.
5. That any member who has once been called upon in this manner, shall be exempted from speaking again for a year.
6. That no member shall be so called upon for three meetings after her entrance into the Society.
7. The two debaters being drawn by lot, the affirmative and negative sides to be left to themselves to decide.

These rules, which are amended and clarified constantly throughout the duration of the Society, show the high importance accorded to control and order by the women. It

could be argued that this is influenced by the male rhetorical tradition. The women felt the need to produce their own 'tradition' through regulation and, in part, the adoption of professional codes of conduct. These codes imitate the public world of business and governance from which the women had been excluded. Furthermore a system of payments for privileges and fines for misdemeanours (rules 1 and 4) are a way of introducing a power hierarchy into the Society based on finances which can be seen to be a mirror of the structures of the (patriarchal) public world. These rules also show the women accepting that time needs to be regulated in order for the smooth-running of the Society; time-limits are introduced so that all business is heard (rule 2). However the rules do allow for some freedom of expression, once allocated a time for their debate the women were permitted to decide whether they will speak for the affirmative or the negative (rule7). This has implications for a study of these women, as it is more likely that they, having chosen which side they would debate, would be in favour of the subject about which they were speaking.

The deliberation upon and writing down of rules to govern the Society meant that each member was both bound by those rules, as were their authors. The democratic way in which the Society was organised, with an elected presiding body (although like the British parliament they had a certain coterie of 'honorary', therefore unelected, members) and the tabling of motions to alter any aspect of the Society's formation, emulated the system of power from which women of this period were prohibited. Any motion or rule that the women passed was both an indication that they could organise and vote in the manner of an elected body, and a pertinent reminder that women were excluded from the source of true power in Britain. Recording their democratic practices in minute books and in printed documents would seem to suggest that the women felt that their Society was significant. This seems to have been recognised at the time; one member recorded that she found the business of debate as appealing as the debates themselves:

> Interesting as the debates were, no less so did I find the preliminaries, often protracted, with which the meetings opened. Here one felt one's self really in the home of Tradition, for the rules laid down in the infancy of the Society were strictly adhered to through its prime and the 'rigour of the game' was never relaxed. The election of the three Presidents of Debate, which took place each November, and the monthly discussions as to future subjects at which views an preferences were frankly and controversially expressed, were as little to be missed as the debates themselves.[15]

The social interaction necessary for the continuation of the Society seems to have been entertainment for Miss Paterson in itself. Throughout the minutes of the Society and in *Ladies in Debate* there is no suggestion that any of the women found the organisation of the Society and its rigour and rules in any way tedious or unnecessary. Indeed the rules are deemed to be important and necessary and on more than one occasion the debates were carried over to another month to allow full consideration of the rules or subjects for debate.

Furthermore, in the act of depositing those documents in the National Library of Scotland the women were further suggesting that the Society was *historically* significant. The meticulous recording of every aspect of the Society, the reporting of debates and the setting-out of accounts is notable on two levels. Firstly it suggests that the women wished to be comparable with male-dominated organisations which exhibited the trappings of power through statutes and ordinances. And secondly it suggests that they believed that their routines as a Society were worth recording for posterity. The systematic approach to organising and archiving the activities of the Society could also have been used by the women to counter claims that their debates and discussions were frivolous, or mere drawing-room matters. By formally recording their activities the women present a written and public record of their Society. Albeit the minute books and associated documents were not deposited for public inspection until the cessation of the Society, they did still form a link between the private province of the drawing room debate and the public realm of the speaker's platform. The Debating Society, then, can be seen as a way of restoring the authority which women were denied in the public domain; they enacted a process of

historicising themselves through printed and written records and simulated the processes of the legal and municipal organisations to which they were refused access. When women were eventually afforded access to some areas of public life in Edinburgh, as elected members on school and parochial boards, they would already have had the skills in place to argue and debate effectively with their fellow, male, board members.

Despite the formal aspects of the recording and regulating of debates the meetings were primarily social events. It is perhaps this social and therefore private (at least to the group) aspect of the Society which meant that it, and societies like it, have not hitherto been theorised and inspected as sources of feminist activity. The Society's members were made up of women from largely similar social backgrounds; they were in the most part daughters and sisters of lawyers, doctors, and businessmen. Although there were a few members who had claim to the aristocracy most were of the mercantile classes, and as such they lived particularly domestic lives. Whilst some of the women did benefit from overseas travel it was likely to be chaperoned. Although the Society's meetings took place in the drawing-room of a well-to-do businessman they would have signified a break from the domestic setting. The social aspect is demonstrated by the network of friends and relatives that made up the core membership of the Society. Related by blood or position, the women formed a social community that regulated itself through self-made rules. After the first meetings, which were likely to have been the continuation of a club that had formed at school, prospective members had to be proposed and seconded to gain admittance into the social network. A glance at the addresses of the members that was printed in *Ladies in Debate* (which can also be seen in appendix 2 of this thesis) would seem to suggest that the women were neighbours and moved in the same social circles. There were also many stronger bonds than mere geography; the members' roll shows that there were many groups of sisters, cousins, mothers and daughters who went to the meetings together or carried on after older relatives left. The social nature of the Society, with its groups of friends and relatives and the fact that only

women were admitted, created a more supportive environment for the women to express themselves and made the performative act of speaking to be as informal and comfortable as was possible. Thus, the Society was able to provide both the professionalism of a well-organised, democratic society and a supportive and friendly, female environment to test and prove their new professionalism.

Topics of Debate

The debates were given new importance post 1880 as the Society ceased to publish their journal, *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine*. Indeed, it was noted that there was a marked improvement in the standard of the debates after this shift away from literary practices.[16] The debates covered all areas of interest to the women; many subjects appeared more than once during the period of the Society's duration, 1865-1935. Topics ranged through the literary, the scientific, to the historical and to the 'issues' and ideas of the day. Throughout the duration of the Society no topics concerning party politics or religious controversy were to be discussed. This was presumably to limit any factions within the Society and to maintain its catholic nature, which could accommodate all manner of beliefs and views. However, some questions of religion and politics do creep in, suggesting that some of the members were apt to disregard their own rules. Notwithstanding these occasional lapses, this rule would have been welcoming to new members of the Society who could join knowing that their most-strongly held beliefs would be honoured. However, by limiting subjects of debate the women may have been aligning themselves with the patriarchal view that women had no place discussing the 'important' issues such as organised religion and party politics just as they had no place in religion or politics in public life. This is countered by the fact that the women often discussed elements of public life to which they were barred. Most obviously they debated whether women had a right to the parliamentary vote, but they also argued over methods

of education, community care and law in which (at least in the early days of the Society) they had no governance.

The subject of debate for each meeting is recorded in the minute books of the Society along with either the number of votes for or against the motion or an indication of which side won. In later years details of which member of the Society spoke for the affirmative or the negative and who seconded their proposals were also recorded. These details are presented in appendices 1 and 2 of this thesis. From this information it is possible to gauge the spread of topics of interest that the women considered and also, as we know the women chose which side they debated on and how they voted, how opinion shifted throughout the duration of the Society. Thus it is possible to analyse the debates and debaters to assess frequency of topics and the development of topics over time. To ascertain the relevance of the public versus private debate within the Society it was decided that, for the purposes of this thesis, the debates should be separated by whether they refered to topics which were largely thought to be in the public domain and those which were considered private (and therefore domestic and feminine). The Public category contains those debates which covers issues of politics, education, foreign policy and business. The Private category includes concerns of culture, religion, the arts and philosophy. These categories were then expressed as percentages of total numbers of debates then further divided into five-year groups. This analysis is expressed in figure 1 (below). It was hoped that this method would show any propensity to discuss either public or private matters at any given period. Before embarking upon this analysis it was assumed that as the women moved into a more public sphere, or redefined what their sphere was to be, their subjects of debate would reflect this growing awareness of social and political issues. However, the data contradicted this supposition; the numbers of debates within each category remains relatively stable throughout the duration of the Society. Indeed, the data shows that discussions on topics that could be broadly described as private (in the main, the Arts) were the most popular topics over the duration of the

Society. This shows a consistency throughout the duration of the Society and indicates that despite the turbulence of these years, cultural pursuits were still of primary importance. The slight, but identifiable, increase in interest about social and political issues does not correspondence with any lessening in affection by the women for the arts and cultural pursuits.

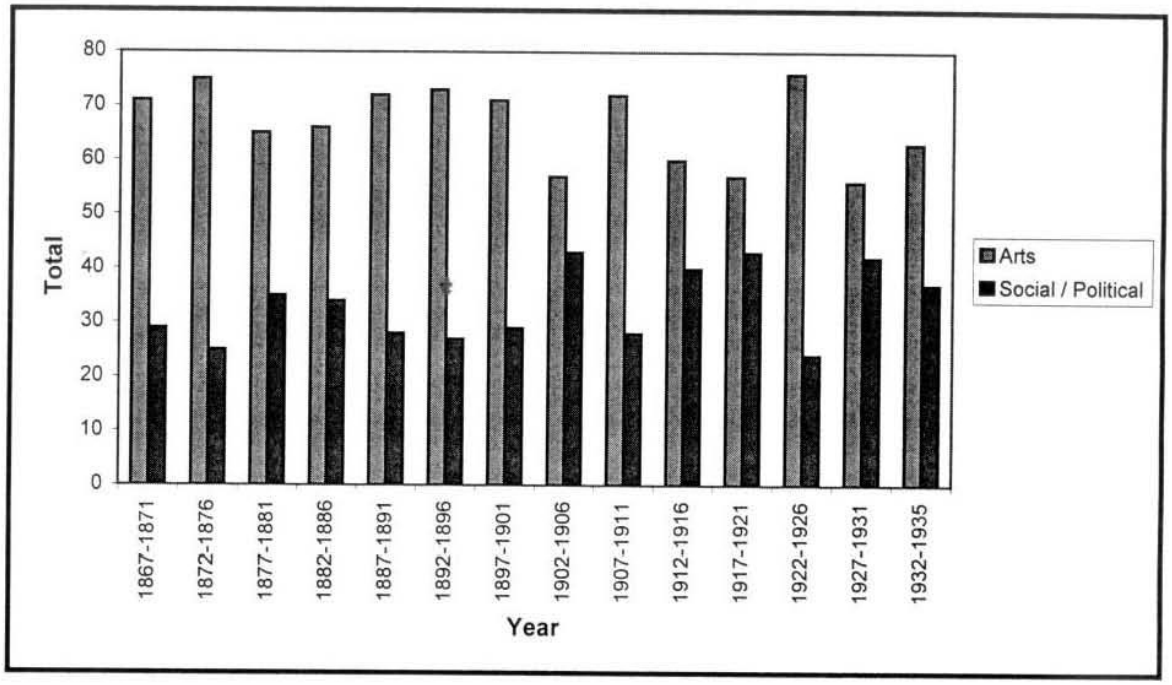

Figure 1 – Incidence of debate categories (over five year periods)

Source – Appendix to *Ladies in Debate: Being a History of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society 1865-1935*, ed. by Lettice Milne Rae, (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1936) and original statistical analysis.

Of course, there are caveats to this analysis. Any statistics must be tempered by the fact that not all members would have been able to propose subjects for debate, either because they were not regular attendees to the meetings or because they felt that they were not confident enough or important enough to propose new topics. Thus, the topics discussed may not be a full representation of the areas that interested the Society's members. Furthermore, the findings in figure 1 do not, of course, show the outcome of debates. The fact that a topic was debated does not denote that the debate had a positive outcome.

Despite the far-reaching advances that were achieved by these women during the period of the Society's existence there seems to be very little fluctuation in their topics of debate. Although the debate titles show minor differences between the popularity of subjects, the Society remained interested in largely the same topics throughout the end of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. Questions concerning the arts and literature were perennial favourites and questions of moral philosophy were also consistently popular. However, there is a discernible increase of interest in British and European affairs, and the number of debates on matters of the law show an escalation in the later period of the Society. This concern with outward matters of policy and legality may have been symptomatic of the women's move into the public realm; as they encountered the civic world they may have had more questions about it. Throughout the years of the Society the question of religion is discussed less and less frequently. This could have been because it was one of the 'taboo' subjects that, along with party politics, they were not meant to talk about, or it could be indicative of the lessening in impact of religion in the women's lives. Whilst this analysis of trends is useful, in that it shows the spread of topics of debate, it is of limited importance in this study as it is apparent from the lives of the members of the Society that their interests took them further into civic world. However, this thesis does include a list of topics of debate and records their frequency, this is included as appendix 4.[17] What is more pertinent for this study is how the women approached debating as individuals and how they perceived the skills and interests that they developed whilst participating in debates. Some of the women were invited to record their experience of the Debating Society in *Ladies in Debate*; reactions to it by others are recorded in the minutes of the Society or in their personal papers. Furthermore analysing how the women used the 'training' they had received in the Society in their later public lives can attribute use-value to the Society.

An analysis of the reappearance of particular subjects and the development of opinions on them is useful for this study. One of the most frequently debated topics was

that of education, more specifically the issues of school education for girls, and higher education for women. Indeed, the first ever debate conducted by the Society was 'Is boarding school education superior to education at home?': education at home won by eleven votes to four. Yet by 1878 when the subject was again debated, school education was advocated by a majority of 14. The topic of home education versus school education cropped up again in February 1918 where school education was again supported. Much debated was the issue of whether primary education should be compulsory and free; the topic was debated five times during the history of the Society and the votes increased in favour over that period. Girls' education was most important to these women, and the question of whether they were benefiting as a sex from increased access to schooling was a question that appeared more than once. In April 1887 the debate, 'Is the education of girls being pushed to an extent dangerous to health?' was dismissed by the Society's members, eighteen votes to nine. Co-education was also debated on several occasions and was largely dismissed at a primary and secondary level but upheld for tertiary level students. The women's own involvement with the education of girls and young women is evident in the debates that they held. As already mentioned in Chapter 2, many of the women were on the boards of schools and colleges and more campaigned for women's higher education, thus debates such as that of May 1886, 'Is it advisable that a training college for women intending to teach in secondary school and private families be founded in Edinburgh?' had special importance. The vote, which was eighteen to one for the affirmative, is significant because in the same year members of the Society founded the St George's Training College that answered the need for suitably qualified teachers in Edinburgh. The members' involvement with the Ladies' Edinburgh Educational Association which campaigned for women's acceptance into Edinburgh University is evident from debates such as 'Are the reforms of the Scottish Universities desirable?' which was carried unanimously. Specialisms in education of a different sort were also evident from the topics of debate: in 1881 Mrs Froebel led the motion for the affirmative

in the debate 'Is it advisable that the Kindergarten system should be introduced in to our country?'. Mrs Froebel was daughter-in-law of Fredrich Froebel, founder of the first Kindergarten in Germany in 1840, and a pioneer of early education.

The list of topics debated also shows that the women were very interested in the way they perceived the women's movement progressing. Indeed many of the discussions point to an interest amongst the women about how they were viewed in public. Debates on dress, make-up and their relations with men do not produce polarised opinions one way or another, instead most of the votes are split almost equally or nearly equally. For instance in June 1891 the debate 'Is there any moral turpitude in dying the hair and painting the complexion? yielded seven affirmative votes and six negative ones. The following May votes were split fifteen to twelve on the question 'Is flirtation morally wrong?'. This issue was not resolved by the progression of time and the spirit of the twentieth century; in 1922 the motion 'Is make-up morally degrading?' was defeated by twelve votes to ten.

Women's employment was another popular issue for discussion. It was universally agreed that women should work: the debate of February 1895 'Should women with a competence work for money?' was carried twenty-three votes to three, but what work they should do was more hotly contested. In 1901 the women voted by twenty-nine votes to one that the lighter forms of agriculture were suitable employment for women but in 1902 they voted that the legal profession was not suitable by eleven votes to four. During the war years when more women took on paid work that had been denied them in peacetime, the women discussed 'Has the employment of women in work hitherto confined to men on the whole been a success?'. It is perhaps significant given the women's differing views on the subject of women's employment that no vote was taken. It is likely that the women could not countenance voting negatively on an issue that was of such national importance and so connected with the issue of suffrage. Through the duration of the Society there does seem to be a growing confidence about the position of

women in society that is reflected in the debates. In 1911 the women overwhelmingly voted negatively to the question 'Are the women and girls of the present day less womanly than those of fifty years ago?'. And in February 1922 they voted positively to the proposal that 'The surplus woman is Britain's strength'. By 1933 the women agreed to a proposal that would have been shocking to the original band of women who met in 1865 'Should every girl be trained to compete in the open market?'.

The Ladies' Edinburgh Essay Society was the first debating society in Scotland, and perhaps Britain, to debate the right of woman to have the parliamentary franchise.[18] The importance of this fact cannot be underestimated. The bulk of work on the sources of modern British Feminism take the militant suffragists in the early twentieth-century as their starting point. However, the fact that women in Edinburgh were considering the issue some thirty or so years earlier belies these assumptions. The first debate on this subject took place in 1866, of twenty young women present only five voted that women should be enfranchised. When the subject was again debated in 1872 the opposing side won again but this time by a majority of only three. By 1884 when the debate was staged yet again the affirmative side won by a majority of five. By the last decade of the nineteenth century the president of the Society, Miss Sarah Siddons Mair, was a well-known supporter of the cause of women's suffrage. In 1891 she proposed the debate 'Should Political Associations of Women make Female Suffrage a primary object?' it was carried by a majority of twenty-eight votes for the affirmative. Again the subject was debated in 1905, this time under the motion 'Should Parliamentary Suffrage be extended to duly qualified women?' the affirmative won by twenty-seven votes to six. In 1914 at the climax of the period which saw the most suffragette action, the motion was again posed, 'Is it desirable that women should have the Parliamentary Vote?' the opposition numbered only nine against an affirmative of twenty-nine. By this time Sarah Siddons Mair was the president of the Scottish Federation of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) and presumably had encouraged some of her fellow

suffragists to join the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society. The Society's move from conservatism to radicalism within the issue of women's suffrage is mirrored throughout the debates. Where in the early years women were more likely to vote towards that which was the status quo in later years they voted to reverse laws and society's conventions. Whilst this move can be seen as a general trend, the issue of women's suffrage was not as radical in the early twentieth century as it was in the mid-nineteenth. The Society's support of women's enfranchisement shows a growing recognition by the women of their integral position in public life and their willingness to achieve that position. They again enact through these debates the move from private to public; by renouncing their right to vote in the 1860s and 1870s the women remained in their own private environment, the ever increasing support for voting rights from the 1880s on suggests that the women were ready to air their views in a more public forum.

As previously mentioned, the views covered by the debates were diverse and concerned all aspects of the women's lives. Indeed, they covered some topics of which the women would have had no knowledge. In 1893, in a debate entitled 'Hobbies and their Benefit', Miss Grace Wood suggested that her hobby was *infanticide*. A granddaughter of the political economist Dr Thomas Chalmers she advocated taking his economic doctrines to their ultimate Swiftian conclusion. Not all debates were serious in tone.

Individual debaters

The only woman to remain a member of the Society for the whole of its duration was its president, Sarah Siddons Mair. A study of the debates she participated in gives an interesting microcosmic appraisal of the individual relationship one woman had with the Society. Although Mair is a special case, she founded the Society, and most of its meetings were held in her house, she contributes to an understanding of how the Society

was run and how it developed. Sarah Siddons Mair directly participated in 73 of the debates, either as first speaker or seconding the motion, which corresponds to about one a year for the term of the Society. She was the most prolific debater of all the Society's members. Interestingly, of all the debates she contributed to she was on the losing side only fifteen times. This could have been because of her persuasive debating technique that is attested to by other members in the minutes and in *Ladies in Debate*, or it could have been because she was such a formidable person that some members were afraid to vote against her motions. Alternatively she could have had the intuition to speak, in the most part, on the popular side of the debate. We can assume that she chose her subjects of debate; it is unlikely that she would have been forced to debate as new members were in the 'rules of debate' quoted above.

The subjects Mair chose are limited to a few areas. She spoke for the affirmative in all of the debates relating to the campaign for parliamentary enfranchisement for women. She was defeated on other matters of parliamentary reform: in 1893 she was defeated in her support for Fabian Socialism, and in 1895 no one could even be found to second her view that the House of Lords should be abolished. She also spoke on behalf of women's training and higher education on several occasions. In February 1874 her erudition on a particular subject, the Swedish liquor laws, found no one to give an opposing view and the members of the Society suggested that she publish her paper on the subject. Mair's radicalism is the most common reason for her few defeats in debates. In 1921 she supported the debate 'Was Ireland ever a nation?' and was soundly defeated and in 1932 her prophetic damnation of Fascism in response to the motion 'Is Fascism making for the happiness and prosperity of Italy?' was not tolerated by her fellow members. Philanthropy was also a favourite subject; the first motion she debated was concerned with ragged schools of which she was a supporter. Her family's dramatic arts background is also evident in the debates that she gave. Questions of Shakespeare's plays

are common throughout the period of the Society and she was an enthusiastic debater on this subject.

It is perhaps testament to the Society's tolerance of different views that Sarah Siddons Mair, despite being an early champion of women's rights and a campaigner for their enfranchisement, could debate alongside women who believed that women should be barred from certain sectors of Society. Her gifts of liberality and of encouragement are attested to in the recollections of members in *Ladies in Debate*. As Mrs Arnott writes:

> As I look back at those thirty-five years of membership, the first ten years stand out in my memory as happiest, most fruitful and stimulating. Later came the Suffrage Movement which was especially prominent in the year just before the War. Opinion was naturally much divided and this cleavage was accentuated in Edinburgh by several unfortunate extravagances. There was a good deal of tension between the different Women's Societies, and I remember gratefully what an asset to our Society was Miss S. E. S. Mair's wisdom, strength and courage during those difficult years.[19]

Despite the fact that the Society was able to incorporate all its members' differing views and to allow those views to be aired there still remained a large percentage of members who did not participate in debates. As appendix 2 shows, only one third of the members listed as belonging to the Society actually participated in debates as main speakers or as seconders, and of those many only contributed once. Certainly, then, the Society was able to fulfil some need for those women whose voices were not heard. Their attendance at debates and their participation in the Society must have had enough significance for them without recourse to speaking. As no testimonies survive from these 'silent members' any estimate of their role in the Society must be based on guesswork.

Conclusion

Anne Ruggles Gere's work on American clubwomen suggests another way for integrating both the private and public aspects of clubs and societies into a holistic appreciation of the work that they did.[20] She suggests that by drawing attention to the

women's use of their literacy it is possible to theorise how these women approached structures of power. Taking Roger Chartier's assertion, 'Literacy is at once a private, hidden practice and a manifestation of power, power more effective than that of public office', as her starting point Gere suggests that by employing themselves in cultural work they were both advancing the state and themselves.[21] This would have significance for silent members of the Society as much as for those who participated vocally. Discussions of art and culture could be radical if they were used in a progressive way in allowing access to power structures. This holds true for the early work of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society when its members concentrated on producing a literary magazine and holding debates. It also has implications for their levels of professionalism when they became members of municipal boards and secretaries of societies in a later period. By appropriating these professional literary practices they were utilising their literacy as a means of exerting power. Gere suggests another way of reconciling the troubling binary opposition of the public/private split, positing that 'Clubwomen of the turn of the century belonged to an alternative public'.[22] This is borne out by the practices of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society.

References:

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[11] Rae, p. 22.

[12] Kahane, p. ix.

[13] Karlyn Kors Campbell, *Men Cannot Speak for Her. Volume 1: A Critical Study of Early Feminist Rhetoric* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989). Others are Kahane and Dunn and Jones.

[14] Rae, p.23.

[15] Miss Mary Paterson C.B.E., 'Impressions of Two Late-comers' in Rae, p. 67-68.

[16] Rae, p. 32.

[17] These eleven topics are: Arts; History and Biography; Domestic 1, which includes political and economic questions; Domestic 2, 'lighter topics' concerning social behaviour; Foreign affairs; Education; Law; Religion; Philosophy; Science; and Miscellaneous. These topics are taken from: Andrew Blake, *Reading Victorian Fiction: The Cultural Context and Ideological Content of the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1989), p. 85. It was decided to utilise Blake's topics to allow for comparisons in future studies between frequency of debates and periodical articles over certain categories. Appendix 4 shows the number of debates in each category for any given year.

[18] This is asserted in Rae, p.33 and also in Leah Leneman, *A Guid Cause: the Women's Suffrage Movement in Scotland* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1991), p. 16.

[19] Mrs Arnott, 'Recollections of Crowded Years', in Rae, p. 63.

[20] Anne Ruggles Gere, *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in US Women's Clubs 1880-1920* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

[21] Roger Chartier, 'The Practical Impact of Writing' in *A History of Private Life – Volume 3, Passions of the Renaissance*, ed. by Roger Chartier (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 110-159 (p. 187).

[22] Gere, p. 53.

Chapter Four - Textual production in a community of women: *The Attempt* and *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine*

In this chapter I intend to place the two periodicals that The Ladies' Edinburgh Essay Society (later The Ladies' Edinburgh Literary Society) produced within the wider context of the study of Victorian periodicals. The chapter will focus on the importance and proliferation of the periodical form in Victorian Britain and particular emphasis will be paid to women's role in this phenomenon. The periodicals in question, *The Attempt* (1865-1874) and *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* (1875-1880) will be discussed in detail; the motivations behind their publication and the importance attributed to them in the lives of their producers, considered. The methodological issues associated with looking at periodicals in general, and specifically the magazines of The Ladies' Edinburgh Essay/Literary Society are assessed. The discourse that the magazines suggest is analysed through textual consideration and through the evidence recorded in the Society's minute books and a community of readers and writers will be argued for, where reading and writing (and speaking through the Society's debates) acts as a testing-ground for new ideas concerning civic and economic issues. This is shown to be evident through an analysis of the mechanics of magazine production, which mirrors the concerns of contributors in its shift from private collaboration and dissemination to a more public forum. The reading and writing practices that the magazines suggest is shown, with reference to other magazines and reading material available to these women. The value attributed to literature and to their writings is put in the context of Victorian literary discourses. Lastly, the effect that the publication of the magazines had on the Society and more specifically, on the community that the women formed, is deliberated.

Methodological issues

This chapter looks at two periodicals that were published by The Ladies' Edinburgh Essay/Literary Society. They are periodicals in that they were published at regular intervals of a month and also distributed monthly at a subscription fee. However, in some senses the term periodical is problematic in that it tends to suggest that the publication was nationally available. Although there is little information about the distribution of the magazines it is hinted at in the minutes of the Society and in the magazines themselves that *The Attempt* had only limited distribution, mainly to the members of the Society. *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine*, however, did enjoy greater proliferation; being sold at railway stations and certain booksellers. So, whilst the later magazine did have greater distribution throughout the country both of them functioned as the magazine of a society and as such were more limited in scope than more nationally available magazines. This position that the magazines occupied, between national periodicals and the private publication of a society is pertinent for this study; like the women of the Society the magazine occupied a liminal space, neither wholly in the public domain nor in the private. As such the magazine will be discussed as a periodical but with the caveat that it was closely allied to a particular group of women and therefore had a more personalised outlook.

Before embarking on this study of particular periodicals in particular contexts it is necessary to set out some more general problems and issues facing any student of periodicals. Perhaps the first question we have to ask in any study of periodicals is, what constitutes our text? Is the text a single journalistic article, and if so what happens to the 'peripheries' of the article - the contents page, the *erratum* sheet and the notes - which accompany it? And if the text is one single number of the periodical in question then what happens to the intertextual relation between one volume and another that both contain part of the same serial story? As individual numbers of periodicals are often bound in

year groups then how can we begin to reconstruct this text, when it has been stripped of its original cover, endpages and advertisements? By binding individual numbers together the librarian has preserved for posterity the periodical but in doing so has negated its original form, making it harder for us to recapture the way in which contemporary readers engaged with these texts.

Volumes of periodicals suggest a more 'book-like' form of the reading matter and encourage the student of periodicals to read in a 'book-like' manner, from cover to cover and chronologically. Whereas the more ephemeral nature of newly published periodicals encourages a less formal approach: the reader may turn first to the latest instalment of an article or story he or she has enjoyed and neglect the more usual front-to-back reading practices associated with the codex form. Conversely the scholar of a bound periodical may read only the articles which relate to his or her interest, say cookery items, and neglect the intertextuality of the periodical reading experience which is problematised by the time involved between one instalment and the next. The texts in question have been assessed in such a volume form; therefore the contemporary scholar can never recreate the reading experience of Victorian women, as such any historical survey is limited.

The importance of periodical publication at this time cannot be underestimated. Despite the well-known proliferation and popularity of the novel throughout the nineteenth century, without the periodical many novelists would never have been published. Their writings were often first serialised and discovered in the periodical press. The heterogeneity of the vast number of Victorian periodical publications (one count suggests over 25,000) is perhaps one reason why they have not been considered as a whole until relatively recently.[1] The reasons given for this vast number of periodical publications are various. Most centrally is the emergence of an expanding middle-class eager to be educated on the opinions and topics of the day but largely lacking in any formal or extensive education. Periodicals could provide fast, up-to-the-minute reports on

popular advances in science, economics, philosophy and politics, ensuring that their readers were kept abreast of all progress, depending, of course, on their continued subscription. These periodicals catered for every facet of society; for specialist interest groups as well as for a more general public. They were aimed at those who were university educated and to those who had little or no education of which to speak. Identifying the readership of these diverse publications can at best be difficult; except through such internal/external clues as editorials, content, ads, correspondence, and publishing archives.[2] The readership of those that catered for particular areas of society is more simple to delineate whereas the general public that read *Blackwood's* or *The Penny Magazine* are harder to identify. Scott Bennett in his article 'Revolutions in Thought: Serial Publication and the Mass Market for Reading', suggests that perhaps the only commonality we can suppose for such readers is that they all engaged in one act; the purchasing of the magazine:

> Here 'the People' are identified not by a supposed ideological allegiance or social status but rather by demonstrable behaviour: making a purchase in the mass market for reading matter. This change in focus is a fundamental one because it looks almost entirely at what 'the People' did rather than what they thought. So confined a focus does not trivialise the subject, however. The market for reading matter was one of the earliest consumer mass markets to develop, and it established itself primarily through serial publication.[3]

Whilst there has been an increase in the amount of work published on Victorian periodicals in recent years this work has tended to look at publishing history and has concentrated on evidence from publisher's records. Whilst some academics have attempted to recreate the reader of the texts from 'Answers to Correspondents' and 'Readers' letters' it has been difficult, if not impossible, to arrive at the biography of any real reader of a periodical.[4] This research, the establishment of the existence of a real reader, is more likely to be approached from the other direction, by the study of diaries and autobiographies. Most notably the establishment of the 'Reader Experience Database, 1450-1914' by the Open University has begun to archive the experiences of actual readers

in history. Eventually it will be possible to search this archive and to arrive at an image of the actual reader of a periodical or book.

Any discussion of periodical production and reception must be couched in an understanding of how the Victorians approached reading matter, periodical literature and writing by women. As Michael Wolff argues:

> To come back to the subject itself, how are we to shorten the distance between ourselves and those who wrote for, produced and read Victorian periodicals? To read as the Victorians read and to understand better how they wrote will require more than the empathy of consciousness. We need to know more than we do about the Victorian unconscious. And, because we are talking of groups as well as individuals, we have to learn how to record the various national, regional, and local 'conversations' which our periodicals have preserved. We have to attempt an intuitive reconstruction of our informants, the sort of investigation with which anthropologists who want to avoid condescending to their informants are now struggling with. So, if we are to make even temporary contact with those who left these fascinating remains someone has to tackle the theoretical problems of adapting the disciplines of psychoanalysis and ethnography to periodicals research so that the Victorians can be properly heard.[5]

With a less ambitious aim in mind than uncovering the 'Victorian unconscious', Wolff writes in an earlier article that to study periodicals is to study the commonplace, the everyday, and, often, the mediocre in Victorian society:

> ...the Victorian press, seen as a whole, is more than a collective term for those magazines to which our interest in particular figures and particular topics draws us. It is worth study in its own right because it represents and articulates, as nothing else does, what was ordinary about Victorian Britain, and we cannot understand Victorian Britain without understanding the ordinary, which is, moreover, also the environment of the extraordinary.[6]

The women writers and editors to be discussed in this chapter were 'ordinary' in that they were neither overly politically radical nor particularly outspoken in their communities, although both radical and conservative views existed within the Society. It is through their periodical that we are able to gain access to their 'ordinary lives'. Studying the periodicals in question is particularly interesting because of their links to an established community of women where writers and readers can be identified by name. It is possible to hear the voices of these identifiable women through their writings in the

magazine. Fiction, opinion pieces and notes to readers all give insightful evidence of the lives of these 'ordinary' Victorian women. Furthermore, as this study gives access to these women as both writers *and* readers it is possible to gain further information about how these two roles interrelated and complemented each other.

Whilst it is to be expected that the greater part of information about the women that wrote for *The Attempt* and *The Ladies Edinburgh Magazine* is to be gleaned from the non-fiction articles that they wrote for their journal; there is also evidence of the women's cultural and societal practices in the fiction that they contributed. The use of literature as historical source has long been prevalent in both disciplines. In the past literature has been used as direct information about a particular time period or a culture often without a full evaluation of the conditions, biases and *fictions* of literary production.

Recent literary critics and historians have found some use value in the fictive works of the Victorian period. The most proffered suggestion is that novels were undoubtedly a shaping and influencing force in the Victorian period, and as such should be interrogated for the values and information that they were designed to confer. Andrew Blake refers to the assertion by many novelists and critics alike in the Victorian period that novels could be used for educative purposes as well as entertainment as a way of recovering the novel as historical source material. By focussing on the educative purposes of fictive literature Blake is able to recover the importance of the novel to the historian:

> ...fictional literature can be seen as active within society, as being aimed at particular readerships within it, of presenting, to that *specifically chosen audience*, certain types of information and attitude, and helping to form or change attitudes and behaviours. There is here perhaps a way forward from the restricting model of fiction as passively illustrative or reflexive of society and towards a history which, by seeing literature as a more important, interactive part of its society, may be able to use it more positively as evidence.[7]

Simple content analysis of fiction articles is not enough here, and using fictive writing as historical source material has its caveats. In *Reading Victorian Fiction – The Cultural Context and Ideological Content of the Nineteenth-Century Novel* Andrew Blake

argues that using literature for its 'typicality', that is, its ability to delineate the 'normal' and the 'everyday' is a fallacy.[8] All reading of fiction for its historical veracity must be tempered by the knowledge that fiction can only offer a partial view as it is always subjective and quiet often self-consciously narrow. One only need remember Jane Austen's remark to her nephew, Edward, that her fiction proposed a partial view of society: 'That little bit (two inches wide) of ivory, in which I work with so fine a brush as produces little effect after much labour'. Only looking at *actual* readers and writers in history can expel this absolutist view. However, there is some virtue in analysing fiction articles; the view that literature can be utilised as source material even merited a mention in *The Attempt*. In Volume 10 of the journal Aliquae contributed the essay, 'The Use of Songs and other Popular Poetry to a Historian'.[9] In it she suggests that the portrayal of society in contemporary literature is not merely suggestive of the mores of the time but indeed epitomises them:

> In applying this thought to the illustration of history by biography, we feel that, as we know a man not so much by the record of the events of his life, and of his personal action with regard to those events, as by an acquaintance with his thoughts expressed in words, either spoken or written; so we understand the character of a nation, not so much by its public acts, its changes of government, its declarations of war, its negotiations for peace, its commerce, its discoveries, its wealth, as by the writings and speeches that have made the profoundest impressions, that have spread throughout the length and breadth of the land, that have been echoed back from amongst the people, - in other words, that have become the lasting and the popular.[10]

For Aliquae reception of a work is the key to its importance to a historian. In being well and widely received the work of literature has passed into the realm of history and has status accorded to it as a result. This is not only true for realist works, those that portray an ideal of their contemporary society are also important as they are 'typical' of what their readers aspire to:

> [Realist works] are invaluable to the historian, in describing, not only as they might by painted in a picture, the dress, furniture, physiognomy, scenery, and occupations that characterise the time, but also the maxims that govern, the manners that prevail, the language that is spoken, the sentiments that are cherished; whilst the writers who become popular – for popularity is in this

> essential – in their endeavours to paint society as it ought to be, are also of great worth. They tell the longings, the aspirations of their readers, they reveal the beau ideal to which they are stretching forward.[11]

Those researching the Victorian period now would undoubtedly be more candid about accepting the premise that literature can provide a window into Victorian culture and society. However, they may agree with her distinction that the popular is more important than any conferment of value in the utilisation of fictive works for historical study.

Fictive writing can be interrogated, then, in the same ways as non-fiction can for evidence of how its writers reacted to the social, political and economic conditions of their existence. Thus, at a basic level a readership can be recovered not just through content analysis, but also through a consideration of the context of their purchasing habits. However, in a small, relatively private publication such as that considered here, the readership can be identified, and even to a certain extent named. When the magazine was eventually published in a public fashion and entered a more public domain it is interesting to witness the effect of the mass market and the demands of the unknown public. It is possible to garner information on this group of women through an analysis of fiction and non-fiction articles in the magazines. By combining their written work with their biographies the historian is able to construct a more holistic view of these specific readers and producers of text.

A female-centred reading community

Women rarely managed to break into roles of authority in the 'major' periodicals of the nineteenth century. Certainly they contributed both articles and ideas towards their sustained popularity but it was only in the smaller magazines that women wielded any real power. Although later in the period with which this study is concerned some women did become quite powerful in the periodical market, Mrs Beeton, Mrs Henry Wood and

more radically, Emily Faithful attained some status as publishers. More and more throughout the Victorian period it became possible to make a decent living from writing and editing for magazines. Mrs Oliphant, perhaps one of the most prolific of all periodical writers of the time, and regular contributor to Blackwood's Magazine, never managed to gain editorial power although she actively pursued such a position.[12] By founding and writing their own magazine women were able to wrest back some of the power of the editor. This study of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society's print production is a case study of one such group which achieved relative authority through print culture. However, as this study will argue, the women of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society worked more as a community than in any kind of power hierarchy. That they were formed primarily as a literary club may have been the impetus for them to indulge their writing skills in a safe and supportive environment. Recent studies have attested to the importance of women's contribution to the periodical market in the Victorian period. D. J. Trela writes in an introduction to one of two special editions of *Victorian Periodicals Review* highlighting women's special significance in this field:[13]

> While exceptions like a George Eliot have been used to allege that it is only the extraordinary woman who could break into and successfully dominate periodical literature and fiction, the scores of less prominent but nonetheless successful women who were able to earn a living writing and editing are more important in demonstrating a pattern that became more prominent as the Victorian age developed.[14]

Whilst *The Attempt* and *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* were written by women, and at least initially, for women they carried no homogenous feminist or female-orientated message; although they did address some issues that women may have been concerned with such as a series on 'women's work' and a number of articles under the banner of 'Our Female Novelists'. Unlike other popular publications of the day they did not carry domestic or marriage advice but instead delivered literary essays and creative writing on a variety of subjects that could be deemed to be appealing to both men and women. The co-operative behaviour needed to produce such a magazine had its share of

censure. Periodicals such as *The Saturday Review* published articles that were distrustful of women's co-operative behaviour, they suggested that women could not be trusted with the responsibility of collective action without the supervision of males.[15] Conservative detractors held the image of the pen-wielding women as a subject for satire.

Periodical production for women in this period was the result of an increased sense of community. Nestor posits that the Victorian period was the site of some of the earliest groupings of women in literary communities:

> The mid-nineteenth century saw this literary phenomenon of an emergent community of woman writers coincide with the social phenomenon of an excess of females in the population, which stimulated a widespread reassessment of women's role and drew many minor woman writers into the discussion of women's relationships.[16]

In the period that saw the advent of *The Attempt* there existed in Britain significantly more women than men. The Census of Great Britain in 1851 reported that there were 10, 223,558 males to 10,735,919 females. Furthermore it noted that of those above the legal marrying age (14 years for males and 12 years for females) 3,110,243 were bachelors and 3,469,571 were spinsters. The reasons that were given for this discrepancy were various, but included the fact that females were more likely to survive infancy than their brothers and that there was a growing tendency for men to wait until they had a career until they married. Wars took their toll, and there was also a flood of emigration to the new colonies.

The necessity for women to find their own activities and employment without assistance from a spouse was raised by a demographic imbalance. For those women that came from middle and upper-middle classes for whom men were not an economic necessity (because they received an income from property or from their family) the issue was not necessarily how to provide for themselves but rather, how to occupy themselves. Collective action by women in all areas of society became, if not commonplace, then certainly an identifiable trend. There was a major increase in the number of philanthropic

and educative institutions and many of these were organised and run solely by women. Periodicals were formed to inform other women of these charities and schools. Some, like *The Englishwoman's Yearbook* (later *The Victoria Magazine*) ceased to be just containers of information about the new work that women were involved with and became more literary in nature, emulating the male-produced periodicals which were so popular at the time. Women in the public eye were seen to be wielding the pen more often than the needle. Working together and often in the absence of men, women formed these organisations in a community of spirit, both to better the wider community and to occupy themselves.

The subjects covered in both magazines produced by the Ladies' Edinburgh Essay Society are various. Volume 6 of *The Attempt* carries an introduction which posits what kind of material was acceptable to the editors:

> In particular, the extraordinary appetite developed for the mental cramming of periodicals, may render a philanthropic critic solicitous regarding the quality and calibre of magazine writing. Newspapers there are of all grades and for all grades in society, whose social tastes are generally the reflection of their political tenets; and outside the charmed circle of true humour, that laughs amiably at all absurdities, have arisen scurrilous publications, that deal in rough sarcasm and empty bombast, to 'tickle' the eyes as well as 'the ears of the groundlings;' but with the graver magazine writing that supplies graver needs, the highest responsibility rests. What is most dreaded is flimsiness. 'Pray you avoid it.' *The Attempt* has its own duty to perform in this particular; and while duly recommending the charms of a sketchy style of writing, as appropriate to a ladies' magazine, we would impress upon the adherents of this periodical never thereby to be seduced from the singleness of aim and earnestness of purpose which constitute the strength of all literature. Whatsoever is true and pure and noble, let it be read in the pages of *The Attempt*, and it will meet a ready response in the hearts of the much-maligned 'Woman of the Period'.[17]

The writer of this piece, Elfie, suggests that *The Attempt* exhibits a higher calibre than the general run of periodical writing. She also posits that there is a correlation between the political persuasion of the reader and the writing he or she reads for pleasure. Thus, it can be argued that in this manifesto Elfie is arguing for a homogeneity amongst her readers; a sense of shared community and purpose. Furthermore, this writing is aimed at 'ladies' and as such exhibits a particular kind of style. This style is described as

'sketchy' yet not 'flimsy'. The writer is at pains to stress that although the style maybe lady-like, and by this we can assume it is less strident than other prose, it is nevertheless to be serious and *earnest*. This passage ending as it does with the claim that women that the magazine is to appeal to are 'much maligned', seems not just to be setting out a kind of mission statement for the magazine but to be arguing against a prevailing discourse in society. Couched in these terms the magazine becomes a political document, which by its very existence argues against the subjugation of women in the period. Its claims to *nobility* and *strength* in writing are masculine in character, yet it seeks to counter the masculine discourse that maligns women. This passage is extraordinary in the magazine in that it addresses its readers personally and seeks to argue for its existence; other arguments of this kind are implicit in editorial decisions. The editor who chooses to run a series of articles on 'Woman's Work' or 'Female Novelists' is prioritising its female readers and their concerns in the same way that this 'Introduction' seeks to do by suggesting that such writing can achieve higher aims than the run of periodical literature.

Writing Practices

This community aspect of the magazines' production is further emphasised by the fact that pseudonymous and anonymous writing is commonplace, and it is not until later issues that 'real' names are assigned to individual articles. Writing under a pseudonym allowed the women outward anonymity (pen names were known to fellow members of the Society). There is a list of known pseudonyms in appendix 5 of this thesis. Pseudonymous writing perhaps allowed the women more freedom to write without impunity, it also meant that the writing came from a non-gendered source. Furthermore by offering a prize for the 'best' essays and poems published, the editors of the magazine were taking upon themselves the role of gatekeepers, validating a certain mode and subject matter above others that they published. This selection process is characterised by

a reading process that is inherently powerful and constructing a power relation between those who have the power, editors, and those that do not, writers. However, this is couched in a relatively supportive atmosphere, the first attempts by any member of the Society at writing for the magazines was automatically published, allowing all the members to participate in the production process. Later submissions were subject to an editorial decision. The editors also exerted control by suggesting suitable subject matters for articles composed for the magazine and retaining all copyright on that material.

Using pen names meant that the textual production was more a result of a private community writing (they knew who the authors were but the outside reader could not); the process of producing 'writing worth reading' was solely conditioned by the internal world of the Society, they gave out their own prizes and had their own editorial policy – separate from that of the 'outside' world. The writing itself, however, did conform to conventions outside the boundaries of the interpretative community of the Society. It often employed a high rhetorical tone and was concerned with a 'high' moral and artistic world that was indeed the preserve of women such as those who were members of the Society. Whilst the women did write of the issues that concerned them, the uses of female idleness being a recurrent theme, there is no evidence of any kind of erosion of the status of women in their writings – until at least the name-change of the magazine brought a growing concern with women's education and employment.

Feminists and book historians have long debated the reasons for pseudonymous writing amongst women in the Victorian period. Perhaps the most widely held belief is that as women were writing in a patriarchal society where their views were so often subsumed by those of men, writing was most likely to get published and reviewed favourably if it was thought to be written by a man. Catherine A. Judd states this point:

> It has become a critical commonplace to assert that the use of male pseudonyms by Victorian women writers, especially domestic novelists, illustrates the repression and victimisation of the female writer. By shrouding the 'disability' of femininity, male pseudonyms offered a way for women to overcome the prejudices of the marketplace.[18]

However, as Judd goes on to argue that it was just as common for men to take pseudonyms as women.[19] Perhaps those who took names of ambiguous gender represented the biggest sector of pseudonymous writing. Vineta Colby posits that the use of the pseudonymn may have been retained even after it had served its political usefulness:

> A vestige of the past, the male pseudonym, lingered on through the nineteenth century, but it had lost its original purpose. When the Brontës assumed their Acton, Currer, and Ellis Bell disguises, they were concealing their femininity in the hope that their work would be read more seriously, that they might be regarded as professional writers rather than as light-weight literary ladies, parson's daughters with nothing better to do with their time than to write books. But by the end of the century the pseudonym had become mere affectation Mrs Pearl Craigie called herself John Oliver Hobbes because she published her first novel in Unwin's Pseudonym Library and had to supply a pseudonym to qualify. She retained it as a whim.[20]

Applying Colby's thesis then, the ladies of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society came somewhere between the necessity for pseudonyms and the use of them as affectation. They had the ability to choose whether to hide their identities behind made-up names and chose to do so, this may be evidence of the women's relative conservatism.

A large percentage of the pseudonyms used by the women of the Society were Greek or Latinate in origin and female in gender, Dido, Melensa; other identified with other languages and cultures Liebchen, Meigeag Bjeag. Only a very few took male-gendered names, Martyn Hay being the only one who contributed regularly. There is no documentary evidence as to why the women felt they could not write in their own names, but we can surmise that it was through a feeling of modesty and privacy. The widespread use of pseudonyms in the magazine could also relate to the community aspect of the Society: if all were to write in *noms-de-plume* then no writer could be singled out for either condemnation or valorisation.

One way of circumventing this problem of identification of the text is through acknowledgement of the 'openness' that is suggested by the periodical form. It can be

argued that by including serial writing and recurring (if pseudonymous) authorship the periodical form resists closure. The heterogeneity of the periodical form is only contained by the fact that it was produced by a clearly definable group in society and as such becomes the literature of that community. By exploring the work of that community, The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society, it is possible to recover the text as a written form of the discourses that were concerning the women of that community. As the magazine was produced for, and by, the Society's members (only later taking outside contributions from 'ladies') the magazine can elucidate not only the discourse of the Society but can also reveal the concurrence of these women's reading and writing practices. Lastly, a community of readers and writers can be argued for, where reading and writing (and speaking through the Society's debates) acts as a testing-ground for new ideas concerning civic and economic issues. They wrote what they, and their community, wanted to read, and they read what others in the Society had effectively written for them. Any discussion of the earlier issues of the magazine cannot be concerned with power hierarchies between producer and consumer that may characterise other studies, as in this case they are one and the same: producers and consumers. However, as the magazine was later published commercially, the women effectively became consumers of their own work and this power stratigraphy changed perceptibly.

Background to the development of The Attempt *and* The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine

The Attempt was published from January 1865 to December 1874 in monthly numbers that were intended for yearly binding. Each volume numbers around 300 pages. In 1874 it was decided to re-launch the magazine as a more public and commercial venture to be published by an Edinburgh firm. The new *Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine*, as it was called, was also issued monthly but was slightly larger, around 400 pages for a

yearly volume. The magazines were printed in Edinburgh, firstly by Reid & Son, from 1865-1872, and subsequently by Colston & Son, 1872-1880. Initially, the printing of the magazine was a family concern; Helen Reid, the first editor of *The Attempt* was the daughter of the proprietor of Reid's printers in Leith. *The Attempt* was filled entirely with contributions from members of the Society, while *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* accepted contributions from 'Ladies' who read the magazine. It is important to note that although the Society later became know as *The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society* and held debates on the first Saturday of every month (except for a break in the summer months) for the 70 years of its duration, the Society's original constitution suggests that it was set up in order to produce a magazine of essays written by members. When the magazine was discontinued a new constitution had to be devised which would omit the reference to magazine production.[21]

The Society began publishing a magazine in its first year of existence, 1865. Since the publication of an account of the Society when it disbanded in 1936, by a former member, there have been few reappraisals of the ladies' contribution to periodical publishing in Scotland, nor their involvement in the formation of civil and educational institutions.[22] *The Attempt* and *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* are not mentioned in the *Wellesley index*, but are in *The Waterloo Directory of Scottish Newspapers and Periodicals*. Most tellingly perhaps, is their absence from K.J. Fielding's *A Checklist of Victorian Periodicals in Edinburgh*.[23] The Society is mentioned in passing in studies of wider movements in Victorian Edinburgh, most notably in *A Guid Cause* by Leah Leneman and a study of the history and formation of Queen Margaret University College by Tom Begg.[24] More recently, an article from *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* was anthologised in *Victorian Women's Magazines* edited by Margaret Beetham and Kay Boardman.[25] The anthology is structured by categorisation of the various kinds of Victorian women's magazines. In it *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* is placed in the section on 'The Drawing Room Journal'.[26] This is based on the erroneous assumption that

the magazine was only distributed to members of the Society. By this point, however, the magazine did have a wider circulation and was able to influence more than just the women who were involved in its production, and invited contributions and readers from every part of the British Isles. There has been no scholarly interpretation of their publishing output and its effects, either on the women themselves, or the times in which they lived.

Both magazines carried a mixture of fictional stories and factual articles, in one-off and serial form. Major series would be carried over several numbers of the magazine, and indeed over several volumes. The magazines also had a commitment to publishing poetry and several poems feature in each issue. These different genres of writing were not separated; making the magazines true miscellanies.

The magazine seems to have been written and produced in relative isolation from the literary aspect of Edinburgh society. Advice was sought regarding the commercial aspect of the publication from various local printers but there is little mention of other literary players in the Edinburgh of the time. And although it was mentioned in the local press the magazine carries little information of events in the city save reviews of art exhibitions and reports of organisations connected with the further and higher education of women. However, the minutes do mention other publications based in London. Contact is established with *Work and Leisure* and advice sought from Emily Faithful of the Victoria Press and publisher/editor of *The Victoria Magazine*. These connections point to a sense that the editors of *The Attempt* and *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* saw those working on similar projects in London as their peers rather than those active in literary Edinburgh.

As a new enterprise *The Attempt* was clearly the result of some debate amongst Sarah E. S. Mair, her co-editor Helen Reid and their friends. The first issue contains this message to their readers:

Hints to our Readers

'The Attempt' again has just begun,
And if you look alone for fun,
Please close this book.

Of sober sense it has its share,
A partial friend might e'en say mair, -
So read the book

You must not too severely try
Our pieces, though they do aim high
In this our book

And don't just read it for yourself,
Then lay the paper on a shelf,
But lend the book;

That so we may more readers get,
For we have just begun as yet
To print our book.

And if you glaring faults shall find,
We ask you once for all to mind
'Tis young our book

We all our very best shall do
To please as well as profit you
With this our book.[27]

This may only serve as a 'filler' in the first issue of the magazine but its author, Incognita, points to a certain tentativeness in the editors' attitudes. Certainly these women were embarking upon relatively new territory and they could expect their efforts to be met by an ambivalent, if not hostile, audience. As noted in the minutes of the Society sales were consistently more profitable amongst the group and their circle than in the open market of newsagents and bookstores.

A study of the mechanics of the genesis of the magazine and of its production reiterates the overall impression that is given by a study of its contents. The focus upon community effort and a move from the private drawing-room atmosphere of a ladies' club to the public domain of societal life is apparent in all aspects of the magazine's

production. Tracing this history it becomes evident that the subject matter and the production of the publishing project were concerned with the same goals.

As previously mentioned, the members of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society were of the leisured merchant classes of Edinburgh. Despite occasional references to the education and improvement of the poor the magazines' topics were largely focussed on the lives and status of their producers and consumers. In the early years of the Society its president, Sarah Elizabeth Siddons Mair, edited the magazines with assistance from Helen Reid. Reid's copies of the two magazines are deposited in The National Library of Scotland and bear her pencilled annotations. Although some members did contribute regularly to the magazine it featured no named columnist, nor any formal editorial. Indeed as much of the writing in the magazine, especially in *The Attempt*, was pseudonymous it is difficult to ascertain which writers were writing most frequently.

The minute-books of the Ladies' Edinburgh Essay Society from the years in which they published the magazine provide an invaluable resource regarding the genesis and machinations of magazine production. They have been used only once previously, in the compiling of *Ladies in Debate*, the history of the Society. Perhaps most importantly, the minutes contain information about the commercial nature of the publishing project and the move from private publication and circulation amongst a select group to a more widespread concern targeting bookstalls and shops. It also becomes apparent from the reports of the editors of the magazine that advertising revenue was sought, although the actual adverts have been lost in the binding of the magazines for library storage purposes.

Increase of circulation is constantly mentioned in the minutes, in the annual report for 1868 delivered by Miss Mair, the president of the Society and chief editor of the magazine, it was reported that:

> Increase of circulation is increase of profit; and increase of profit is improvement in every way. The magazine could them be enlarged, the writers regularly paid, and many improvements in other ways could be introduced.[28]

This plea was reiterated at yearly intervals for much of the magazines' duration. In the earlier years of the magazine Mair continually makes another request in her annual reports, namely that submissions should be more political in nature and address more of the 'issues' of the day:

> To old and able writers the Editors suggest that more papers on the subjects of the day would add much to the interest of their Magazine. Looked at as a Magazine entirely conducted by ladies *The Attempt* scarcely takes sufficient notice of such subjects as the education and employment of women. It had always been the intention of the editor [S.E.S. Mair] not to stamp their magazine as belonging to any particular party, but they think that by admitting papers on such subjects treated form all points of view, it would gain in interest without losing any of its catholic spirit. Let our Conservative and our Liberal members send us papers on their subjects looked at from their different standpoints.[29]

These annual invocations to write in a more political manner disappeared from the minutes in 1875 when the name of the magazine changed to *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* and submissions were accepted from ladies who were not members of the Society. At this time the essays printed do seem to become more political and socially-aware in nature, especially concerning the admission of women to the universities in Scotland, and women in the workplace.

The economic imperative is evident even at the very beginning of the publishing project; suggestive of the fact that the women were aware that other literary and essay magazines were able to be self-supporting. A number of policies were set out by the editors in order to achieve this goal; the Society's members were to sell as many copies as possible to friends and acquaintances, sponsorship and advertising were to be sought, and later the women were to find shops who would be willing to sell the magazine from their shelves. The swelling of membership was another issue that was entrusted to members in order to make the Society and the magazines more profitable, through membership revenue. It is evident from the minutes that the Society did grow exponentially during its first few years of existence; in 1868 it was reported that while in 1865 the roll of the Society was five, within four years it had increased thirteen-fold. Members of the Society

were encouraged to become contributors to the magazine; the following statistics were recorded as being unsatisfactory:

> In 1870, the Society had about 70 members; of them only 19 appeared in the Magazine.
> In 1871, the Society had upwards of 80 members; of these 27 appeared in the Magazine.
> In this year, 1872, the Society has had 76 members, of these 34 have appeared in the magazine.[30]

It is evident from these accounts that not only were the members of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society intelligent and socially aware, they were also cognisant of a financial imperative that had its consequences on their Society. Clearly the women met not merely to discuss the literature, philosophy, and politics of the day but to manage a business; they were not bluestockings but businesswomen. One of the clearest ways in which the name of businesswomen can be applied to the members of the Society was the way in which they realised the benefits of advertising in their magazine.

Ellen Gruber Garvey has noted that in accruing advertising revenue the producers of a magazine were not simply boosting the projects' coffers but were also changing the way the magazine was read and perceived by its consumers:

> The advertising supported magazine as an institution has buttressed the interests of advertisers and the commercial discourse as a whole, and constructed the reader – especially the female reader – as a consumer. Even as advertisements became touchstones of modernity and its fragmentations, ads came to seem natural and ordinary to readers at the end of the nineteenth century.[31]

Aware that their readers were not simply readers but consumers of the text, the members of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society identified advertising as a viable method of freeing capital to increase the size and distribution of their publication:

> 4th Jan 1868 - Miss S. Mair then stated that fifty additional copies of the January number of *The Attempt* had been printed for presentation to the advertisers in the Magazine, and mentioned in reference to the cost of printing the advertisements that the charge made for a double sheet of advertisements would be 12/- a month, or from £4 to £5 a year.[32]

By including advertising in the magazine the women moved their magazine from a private to a public forum. Advertisers are naturally interested in the placing, distribution and eventual readership of their work. As such those that attract advertisements for their publications have to provide this information, and often have to improve on it in order to keep their advertisers happy. The writing contained in the magazine then, is no longer for private circulation but for the perusal of those consumers who are buying not only the essays and creative writing but the advertisements that feature between the text and the binding. This was a much more public forum for the writers, many of whom did not publish anywhere else. It could also be suggested that the growing interest in more social and political articles in the magazine could have been as a direct result of the magazine's circulation in society, a society which would expect a certain type of writing from a group of women who met to debate each month.

An increase in size of the magazine was sought from as early as 1867, two years into the publishing project. Estimates were sought to test the viability of such a project:

> Miss S. Mair read an estimate from Messrs Colston and Son from which it appeared that the expense of printing two hundred copies of *The Attempt* monthly with eight additional pages would be £64.10 which after selling every number would leave a debt of £4.10. That the printing of three hundred copies without an increase of size would cost £64.10 to pay of which 215 copies must be disposed of each month. Which if the three hundred copies monthly with the additional eight pages would be £83, to pay which 282 copies must be sold per month, with the profit arising form the sale of three hundred would be £7. It was decided that no increase either in size or circulation should take place at present.[33]

The expansion embarked upon when the magazine began to be published publicly under the name of *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* crystallised the problems of circulation and size that the women had already encountered when publishing *The Attempt*. Payment to contributors could still not be undertaken, despite continued reference to it in the minutes. In spite of the publication of an issue containing a very popular article on Women's Education (which sold 500 copies instead of the usual run of 200) the magazine was in some financial difficulty. In November 1879 they received a letter from their then

publishers, McLaren and McNiven of Edinburgh who stated that they were under such economic difficulty that to continue running at such a loss was not financially viable. Subscriptions had dropped from the necessary two hundred to one hundred and thirty-one. A new publisher was sought and J. Wilkie, who succeeded McLaren and McNiven, was keen for the magazine to increase in size and expand circulation, citing the relative smallness of the operation as the reason why it was not succeeding. He also advocated bringing the magazine to a wider audience:

> In sending out the magazine as publication to the newspapers, where criticism and comparison are invited; and it is obvious that, in offering 32 pages for 64, however well-written, there is no chance of securing purchasers who have no other motive for subscribing than they get value for money.[34]

Furthermore, Wilkie suggests a vision of what the magazine could aspire to:

> There is room for a Ladies' Magazine in Scotland; and I am satisfied that if the Ladies' Association [sic] would take up the matter with spirit and enterprise, and resolve to place the present magazine on a broader basis, and spend a little money in doing so, they would reap the advantage ere long in seeing their magazine prosperous and influential. No publication can exercise much influence until it has secured a 'following' large enough to make it independent: and this independence can only be gained by judicious means by employing the necessary means to earn it. A Ladies' Magazine should be interesting to Ladies; should contain matter to which, month by month, they will gladly turn for information, counsel or amusement; and in the selection of articles, as wide a variety of taste should be studied as is compatible with a magazine aiming at a high standard of general excellence. (...) There is a great deal of literary talent waiting only to be fired into activity; such a Magazine like yours offers so good a field for its training and nurturing that it would be a great pity were it allowed to go down for want of support.[35]

Wilkie goes on to state that to achieve this standard and to attract the best writing it would be necessary to pay contributors, even if this were to be only a nominal amount. From the evidence of the minutes it is obvious that Wilkie's comments caused much debate amongst the members of the Society; opinion swung from disbanding the magazine altogether to whole-hearted approval of the scheme. Mair, in her president's address synthesised these views:

> The president in submitting this letter to the Meeting, thought the time had come when the Society must accept the alternative, either to make a decisive effort, to

> give their Magazine something more than a mere amateur existence, or cease to 'play at business' altogether. The work that had been started as an encouragement to young girls to cultivate literary tastes now engaged their mature energies, and to make it worthy of that association, should be placed in a position to accomplish something more influential than hitherto, as an agent in the serious business of life. Failing this, it would be better to hand down the inheritance to another band of learners, and turn to some more fruitful field for the exercise of the present Society's talents.[36]

The members voted on this issue and decided to give the magazine another year's trial. The rhetoric employed in this debate is interesting. Mair suggests that up until that point the ladies had been 'playing' at business, but the time had come for the magazine to become involved in the 'serious business of life'. Business and the commercial side of the operation is certainly the most important issue here, the content of the magazine is not discussed in any great detail. Here Mair seems to be suggesting that there has been a shift amongst the members of the Society from *girls* to *women*. The Society has gone from fulfilling the needs of 'girls to cultivate their literary tastes' in 'a mere amateur' enterprise to engaging 'mature energies' in the 'serious business of life'. It is suggested that the women are no longer learners, but have become professionalised magazine producers and as such have responsibilities to their professionalism. Commercial viability seems to be based on size and visibility rather than content. The main outcome of the discussion, then, is not a change in direction for the magazine but a redoubling of the commercial imperative, indeed, to make the magazine bigger, better, brighter.

In order to finance this commercial effort the members of the Society were invited to buy shares in the magazine's future. Shares were to be bought in half or whole lots at one pound each and it was hoped that £100 would be raised. By becoming shareholders in their magazine the women were entering in to a fiscal relationship as well as a social, community-based one. Their investment can be seen as an example of their commitment to the Society and to each other, but also to their wish to enter into the wider community on the strength of their magazine. There is no disquiet as to whether the magazine warrants such investment. It is noted in the minutes:

> There is a good opening for the Ladies' Society Magazine, as the first and only one of its kind in Scotland, and it is generally acknowledged that were it placed commercially on a firm footing, the calibre of the writing is well able to maintain the position.[37]

Proposed uses of the extra space in the magazine were set out in the minutes:

> The additional 16pp will give space for longer and more important articles; a larger monthly instalment of fiction, more poems, a fuller library table [book reviews] and a more varied column of stray notes [general interest and readers' queries]. Two entirely new features are to be introduced, a Book Exchange Column intended to be of special use to students, and a review of monthly questions on Literature and History, prizes being offered for the best answers.[38]

The actual changes to the magazine, made possible by its more commercial footing, whilst still literary in nature were more engaged with events and interests outside the Society. There is a definite correlation between changes in the magazine's publishing practices, the development of audience and the magazine's textual content, canvassing for contributors from outside the Society, and gearing their magazine more towards those who were taking the newly instituted classes for women at the University. *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* was moving at this time away from the private project of *The Attempt* and engaging more fully in the interests of the outside world. That this occurrence coincided with an increase in creative writing in the magazine suggests that the balance of features needed to take account of their new readers. There is much emphasis in the minutes on the gap in the publishing market that their magazine is fulfilling, as if this new more commercial project was targeting an identified niche market.

The payment of contributors is reported as being a welcome introduction to the magazine's constitution. Some semblance of a power relationship seems to be set up by the payment of writers; the editor is reported in the minutes as stating:

> ...Another still more important change, was that of the regular payment of contributors 1/- a page. Of this change it is impossible to overestimate the importance. I confess that I myself when we first began it had not realised how very great a step upward we were making. But it is easily accounted for, not merely the amount paid to each contributor pleases, for the sums are small and

> some of our writers might possibly take their wares to a higher market. But the great advantage to us – the Society, is two fold: first it enables us to pick and choose, secondly, it puts refusal (a valuable power indeed!) completely in our hands. We all know how difficult and ungraceful it is to look a gift horse in the mouth – but when the animal is offered us for sale, we gain a perfect right to scrutinise him from jaw to fetlock and to refuse our money if we do not like the sorry beast. Nor are we obliged to say why we don't like anything, I do not like you is all sufficient.
>
> This of course puts contributors on their mettle and induces them to give us as good as they can – the better for them, for the magazine and for us. Let us look upon this then – as what it really is – the raising of the standard, consequently of the money value of our magazine.[39]

Payment of contributors, then, was not so much a financial burden as a boon. It enabled the editors to heighten the cultural value of their magazine and consequently its financial value. The women had entered into a capitalist power structure far removed from the first, innocent issues of *The Attempt* which as 'Hints to our Readers' suggests aimed to please and educate and encouraged the increase of readership by lending not purchase.

Categorising the magazines

The move from privately published magazine to public commodified product was not wholly a business move. Throughout the duration of the Society's publishing project their efforts were sustained through the existence and auspices of the club/Society. This has implications for the nature of the publishing project as despite its move into a more public domain it always remained implicated with the club-like atmosphere of a women's society. This study proposes the view that, although the women members of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society were, at this stage, far from being the 'New Women' of later decades, they were certainly 'advanced' in some aspects of their lives and certainly willing to question the society in which they lived. The genesis of *The Attempt* and *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* had as much to do with a proliferation of ladies' clubs and societies as it did with the proliferation of periodical titles. According to David Rubinstein the earliest formal clubs, where premises were bought and rented, and a

subscription paid, were formed in the 1870s.[40] However, it is obvious from this and other studies that women were meeting on a regular, if less formal basis, much earlier than this date. Certainly The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society intended to be a relatively formal organisation, meetings were planned well in advance and members were asked to abide by a formal constitution. Rubinstein further suggests that these clubs, formed in the last three decades of the nineteenth century, were quietist in nature and unlikely to participate in any political lobbying. Whether as members of clubs or not, as individual consumers women provided a central market for the proliferation of the periodical press. As one critic has noted:

> Women constituted a large portion of the reading public and in the second half of the century also became targeted as key consumers vital to the development of consumer capitalism. Women's magazines played a significant role in the move to a mass consumer society through the way in which they constructed representations of female consumers and also through the way these representations were commodifed.[41]

Margaret Beetham and Kay Boardman have attested to the variety of genres and authorial voices contained with the large and expansive category of Victorian Women's Magazines.[42] In their anthology they identify eight varieties of magazines, and identify *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* as belonging to the category of the 'drawing-room journal'.[43] Alongside the *Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* in this category are *The Court and Lady's Magazine and Museum*; *Mrs Ellis's Morning Call*; *The Victoria Magazine*; and *The Ladies' Cabinet*. Beetham and Boardman argue that this kind of magazine was related to earlier journals that circulated before Victoria's accession to the throne. Furthermore, they suggest, that although they were liberal in politics the magazines were aimed at a wealthy upper-class. However, they 'addressed a specifically female readership [and] also encouraged women as writers and producers'.[44] They conclude by intimating that general illustrated magazines superseded these drawing-room journals. Beetham and Boardman's conclusion that *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* was a 'drawing-room journal' does not, however, take into consideration its increased distribution and general

professionalisation in later years. It can be argued that *The Attempt* and *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* had at least as much in common with the category of 'Feminist Journals' of which *The Englishwoman's Journal* (1858-1864) and *The Englishwoman's Review* (1866-1910) were the main exponents. *The Attempt* and *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine*, in common with Beetham and Boardman's definition of 'Feminist Journals', include discussions and practical advice on women's work, women's contribution to literature and the arts and the changing status of women in Victorian society. Whilst the magazines in question may follow the general definition of the 'Drawing-Room Journal' in that they were aimed at middle and upper-class women they fall between the two definitions made by Beetham and Boardman.

The main identifiable aim of the two publications of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society was education for their readers. Although not blatantly expressed as such, the magazines provided a comprehensive cultural and political instruction for their readership. Subjects covered included issues of philosophy and history, women's issues, pastimes and art – alongside short and serial fiction and poetry. This programme of light reading alongside more educative articles intended to form a balanced diet of reading is one that Jennifer Phegley suggests that *The Cornhill Magazine* was offering its women readers in the early 1860s:

> ...Despite Thackeray's concern for the sensitivities of 'the ladies,' the magazine did not completely ignore controversial topics and, in fact, made an effort to cover the important issues of the day as a part of its educational purpose.[45]

Though the ultimate aims of *The Cornhill* and *The Attempt/Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* may have differed they sought to achieve their agendas in similar ways. The juxtaposition of 'light' articles such as poetry, fiction or essays on domestic concerns with those on women's employment and their status in society was perhaps intended to sweeten the pill of political issues and to appeal to a broader audience.

The motives of the two publications were, however, at variance. *The Cornhill* advocated the education of women and their induction into civic life as a way of keeping them occupied whilst they waited for their soon-to-be husbands to establish themselves as 'professional gentlemen'.[46] In contrast, the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society seemed to want this status for their readers simply because it was their right. And whilst *The Cornhill* stopped short of actually suggesting what these superfluous women might employ themselves with, *The Attempt* and *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* were at great pains to delineate all possible avenues for the *gentle*woman. Perhaps as a more mass-market publication *The Cornhill* could not publish radical articles concerned with the education and employment of women as it might wished to have done without endangering its popular-based readership.

Phegley suggests that *The Cornhill*'s educative programme was to provide an equal measure of light and serious articles, and in some ways the editors of *The Attempt* and *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* came to the same conclusions. Too much sensation or frippery would undermine their greater purpose - to provide reading material to the serious young woman. The articles were written in such a way as to provide a holistic programme of education:

> Thus, fact and fiction work dialogically within the pages of the magazine as the educational quality of realist fiction is promoted, and the factual articles are made palatable by the incorporation of fictional elements that would entertain as well as instruct readers.[47]

This is true also of the magazines of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society. Factual articles are on the whole written in an informal style, although some do deploy rhetorical devices, and often contain anecdotal (or pseudo anecdotal) material. Conversely fiction and poetry are often of a historical nature and confer at least a smattering of knowledge whilst they entertain.

The literary aspect of the magazines

The subject most written about within the pages of both magazines of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society is that of literature. If the Society was originally formed in order to help young ladies choose and think about their reading then this is certainly reflected in their journal. Few issues are without reference to the process and practice of reading or to individual works of literature. Particularly common in the earlier issues of the magazine are references to the 'right' and 'wrong' types of reading matter and the benefit to be gained from a programme of reading. Later issues seem more confident in the choice of reading, as if an earlier insecurity had been erased and book reviews become a more common way of suggesting suitable reading. Much of the advice given to reluctant and insecure readers is conservative in nature. The phenomenon of the sensation novel is scorned. Readers are encouraged to read only works which are morally sound, the power for the 'wrong' type of literature to corrupt is ever present. This tendency to immorality in literature is blamed on the age in which they were living, where traditional values were being replaced by a pleasure principle. The quantity of literature produced in the period is also alluded to and seen as unacceptable. The pressure of choice is characterised as impassable and the writers see themselves as arbiters of taste: their job is to navigate the hesitant reader through the maze of available reading.

M.E.M. writing in Volume 1 of *The Attempt* categorises two types of modern literature:

> ...let us distinguish between two classes of novels – those which aim at drawing human nature as it is – in which the characters are real people, with little joys and little sorrows, temptations to struggle with, and faults to overcome, and not heroes and heroines lifted for above ordinary life by the force of some great passion, be it love, hatred, jealousy or revenge – and those which from beginning to end are filled with exciting, and generally very improbable incidents like the much read works of Miss Braddon and Wilkie Collins.[48]

The writer goes on to suggest that works such as Mrs Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*, which was being serialised in *The Cornhill Magazine* in 1865, were more likely to appeal because they featured 'real' and 'honest' characters. Novels of worth are, according to M.E.M., those which provoke further thought than simply being caught up in the action and events read about. She writes:

> No-one can deny that sensation novels are interesting and exciting. It is not pleasant to stop before you get to the third volume, but when you do reach that point and lay down the book, you feel that you have been carried away and interested and excited by characters which, generally speaking, are not worthy of admiration. (...) The effect of reading many such books is most injurious. Our notions of right and wrong get unsettled, and we are apt to admire what is not really true and good. The books we read have just as much influence on our characters as the companions with whom we associate, and it is therefore our duty to choose those which will foster every right and noble feeling.[49]

The writer here clearly does not subscribe to the views of Wilkie Collins on the reading public (or indeed to his novels) published only a few years before in Charles Dickens' journal *Household Words* under the title 'The Unknown Public'.[50] In this article Collins 'discovered' the reading public of the penny magazines and sensation novels that perhaps constituted the greater part of the 'reading revolution'. He suggested that although the material that they were reading was of little value in itself, the important fact was that they were reading and would graduate to more 'valuable' material at a later date. For M.E.M. this graduation to higher standards of reading did not seem imminent, for by reading this valueless literature, readers were neglecting a 'duty'. On several occasions reading is described in terms of consumption. In the article 'On Novels "Played Out"' by Alma in Volume 3 of *The Attempt* the writer warns against gorging on literature and rather to treat novels as sweets, to be eaten (read) only as a treat. The choice of reading matter available is said to be 'appalling' by Alma, her advice is to limit the number of books read so as not to have a negative effect on the reader:

> The truth is, let who will deny it, much novel reading has a deleterious effect; it should be read as we eat sugar plums, not as an article of staple food, but as a slight zest when the meal is over; it should constitute our recreation, not the business of our lives.[51]

If Volumes 1-3 of *The Attempt* carried articles warning of the dangers of over-indulgent reading, then Volumes 4 and 5 offered a recovery of reading practices that would benefit their readers' lives. 'On Self Culture' by R.N. in Volume 4 and 'Reading' by Enai in Volume 5 virtually set out a manifesto for educative reading practices which skirted around the dangers of reading for dissolute pleasure. R.N. advocates planned reading over haphazard perusal of reading matter; to read without any strategy is to risk the wastage of time and indolence of mind:

> Idle and indiscriminate reading is a barrier to all real culture; it would be better to spend one hour in reading according to a steady plan than six in skimming over subjects after the butterfly manner I have described.[52]

Again it is suggested that reading and study are not the only means to a lively mind, the suggestion being that reading must be balanced with activity:

> It is a great mistake to suppose that self-culture means only the cultivation of our minds by reading and studying. This is necessary, but it is not the whole or the half of what we have to do; some people spend their lives in literary pursuits, and are surpassed in clearness of judgement and acuteness of observation by others, who are too busily employed in practical matters to spare much time for reading and thought.[53]

Thus the programme of self culture that the magazine would seem to present is one of many avoidable pitfalls. The ladies were not to indulge in the indolent reading of too many or too sensational novels, and they were to balance even the study of serious literary works with the occupation of the body. Interestingly R.N. goes on to state that although working women from lower in the class-structure of society had little chance to educate themselves through a programme of improving reading they were less likely than their leisured sisters to have 'an expression of vacancy, denoting absence of thought'.[54]

The intricacies of the proposed plan of reading is further deliberated by Enai in her article 'Reading' in Volume 5 of *The Attempt*.[55] Again the idea of the ladies' duty and responsibility to follow a plan of reading is underlined:

> An old writer tells us that books are some of the signs and figures by which God speaks to man; and looking on them in this solemn light, it becomes our sacred duty to apply ourselves to gain from them all the benefit they are intended to impart.[56]
> In this age of books, the privileges are great, but the responsibility is equally heavy; and that superficial tendency, which is just now weakening everything, appears also in our manner of reading. To read with profit there are two essential qualities, viz. – to read thoroughly and to read sincerely.[57]

Having covered how to read, Enai then discusses what to read. She warns against self-navigation through the complexities of the library and suggests that guidance be sought. A cautionary tale is told about one woman who 'lost breath sometimes in her soul' because she read everything that came in her way rather than selected that which would elevate the moral character. Enai suggests that her audience read that which 'tells the truth' even though it be fiction; advocating realism over sensation. 'Truth' here relates to moral and religious truth, and Enai reiterates the Platonian concept that art by imitating truth in fact subverts it. This argument is similar to that deployed by those opposed to sensation literature that to substitute emotional response for moral and intellectual response to literature is dangerous and irresponsible. However, Enai, like Plato, does see the uses of literature in a community if they are intended to educate rather than titillate and inspire the reader to greater virtue. In a highly rhetorical end to her piece on reading, Enai suggests that reading for pleasure and information are God-given activities intended to raise the reader to a higher moral life:

> Then, let those who enjoy the privilege of uninterrupted study, use it earnestly, receive it as a sacred responsibility, and let those to whom it is denied, give it up in faith, assured that God will no more suffer our mental than our spiritual faculties to fade for want of food, and by a way we know not, He who has planted those longings and desires within us, will amply satisfy them.[58]

The reading programme advocated in the early issues of *The Attempt* and suffused through these writers' articles suggest that reading and literacy were of primary importance to the members of The Ladies' Edinburgh Essay Society. That these writers felt it necessary to reiterate their points about the dangers of speculative reading and the

benefits of reading as part of a programme suggests that these ideas were much debated amongst women of their society, and the issue of reading a topical one.

Alongside these didactic articles about reading the magazines carried more practical information. From Volume 7 *The Attempt* carried a regular book review section called 'Our Library Table'. Initially the titles recommended (all were positive reviews) were those which enforced the views expressed in the articles on reading. That all the reviews were positive in nature has interesting implications for what the editors saw as the role of the magazine. It certainly seems as if these book reviews were not quite reviews but recommendations; further evidence of the magazines' interest in instruction rather than entertainment. The suggested texts were all either morally uplifting or educationally improving. Titles from the first volume where the feature appears include: *The Celtic Origin of Greek and Latin* by Thomas Stratton M.D.; *The Works of George Berkley D.D.* edited by Professor Fraser of Edinburgh University; *A Memoir of Jane Austen* by J.E. Austen Leigh and *Stepping Heavenward: A Tale of Home Life* by the Author of *The Flower of the Family*. Thus the educational, theological, biographical and domestic are the suggested mainstay of reading experience. Interestingly, however, despite all criticisms of the genre, *Sensation Novels Condensed* by Bret Harte is also recommended. Perhaps the members of the Society felt they had to be aware of what they were condemning, or alternatively they felt that despite their protestations without an element of the populist, their reading tastes were a bit dry. The 'Our Library Table' feature continues throughout both magazines in a similar mode.

However, prior to the introduction of the feature, a book review did appear of a work which was much more radical than those advocated later. *Women's Work and Women's Culture* edited by Josephine Butler was discussed by Sarah Siddons Mair under the pseudonym of Des Eaux in Volume 5 of *The Attempt*.[59] The book was one of the first that openly challenged Victorian hypocrisy relating to the allotted roles of women. It castigates a society that allows the wastage of time by middle and upper class ladies

whilst tacitly allowing the drudgery and prostitution of poor women. Later the magazine adopted part of the title of the book for a series of articles on 'Woman's Work'. In the review Des Eaux examines two particular issues addressed by Butler, that of the Superfluous Women and Female Suffrage. On the topic of the idleness caused by the demographic inconsistencies of the time, Des Eaux writes:

> But it is a difficult subject, and if the writer has failed to make quite clear what should be the remedy, who can be astonished? The true spirit in which we ought to seek a solution to our difficulties, is that which breathes more or less through all these essays before us: - Lay no embargo on any work for woman; let all try what work they will, for in the long run we need not fear that woman's work will be done by men, or men's by women; the work will always be done by the best workers, and why forbid either men or women to do that which they cannot?[60]

Whilst the writer suggests that emigration may be the key to the problem of 'superfluity' Mair instead suggests that instead of leaving the country women in search of husbands should stay where they are and fulfil their own capabilities irrespective of her marital status. This is a yet more radical proposition. However, on the subject of the suffrage Mair is less radical; she agrees with the writer that there is no particular barrier to women voting rather that they should not necessarily claim it as their right:

> The object of this essay is not to claim the suffrage as a right for women, but to prove its expediency, and we think that the writer has shown that there is at least much to be said in favour of her opinion.[61]

As this article was printed in 1869, only one year after the defeated Reform Bill where the subject of women's suffrage was first debated in Parliament, that the subject was even mentioned can be construed as a fairly radical act. However, this must be tempered by the fact that the article was written and accepted for publication by the Society's president and editor. It is likely that Sarah Elizabeth Siddons Mair's voice was the most progressive to be heard around the dining table of number 5 Chester Street.

'Women's Role' in the magazines

In later issues of the magazine the majority of articles move away from abstract concerns for the education and use of leisure time by women and begin to show a marked interest in the specific roles women could take on in the wider society. Articles deploring the idleness of middle-class women like themselves appear alongside suggestions for the improvement of education and employment of women. Traditional constructions of femininity are chastised:

> There has, we are bound to suppose, been an original at some time or other for a type of romantic womanhood which should be relegated entirely to weak novels and second-rate plays, and which has been finely caricatured in 'Lispings from Low Latitudes;' but if these beings do exist, who, looking through their curls, proclaim that romance is so nice, we can only say it has never been our misfortune to meet them.[62]

The same writer also castigates the 'advanced woman' for neglecting her place in domesticity:

> Let her be wise in politics as in everything else which can widen her sympathies and educate her brains, but let her beware of deserting her won post for one the duties of which she can hardly understand; let her remember rather that she who is a traitor to her own cause Want of occupation is at the bottom of much of the confused jabber about women's rights, but if the talkers would look well first to their ordinary duties and develop the powers that are in them for womanly usefulness, they would not burst so rudely on the 'divine silences' with unaccustomed shrill voices, proclaiming impracticable or undesirable schemes.[63]

The magazine then, presented a plurality of voices on the subject of women's role in society and was ambivalent as to whether their place should be in the home or in the wider community. This theoretical debate on the role of women was supplemented by more practical advice in the form of the series of articles entitled 'Women's Work' which appeared between 1875 and 1876. The series' editor, Phoebe Blyth, states that there had been a sea change in the way that women were perceived in society, and she conjectures possible reasons for this.

> This change has been brought about be various causes: some ascribe it to the greatly increased and rapidly increasing wants of high civilisation, which make it difficult for the exertion of one to supply the needs of all that are connected with him even by family ties; others take a more gratifying view of the change, and consider that it has arisen from the higher estimate now made of woman, in her intellectual nature as well as social position, which would afford her varied powers full scope for development. Some importance is also to be attached to the progress of machinery, which has greatly interfered with the domestic character of female industry. We must admit, too, that we sometimes look in vain for the chivalrous feelings of the Middle Ages, when men shielded and cared for all who were less strong than themselves. Experience also has shown that 'capability' in various directions is not a question between men and women, but between individuals of either half of the human race; so that the question now arising in many quarters should not be, What can women do? but, What is it wise or expedient that women should do?[64]

The writer then, rejects all suggestions of biological determinism and states that in society's present situation it has become necessary for women to work in some form. Later in the article she suggests that this work is not merely 'occupation' for idle hands but a means of self-support:

> ...we propose to consider woman's work on what may be termed its prosaic side – i.e., as a means of providing a livelihood – 'gaining money' some would call it; 'being independent' is its definition by others.[65]

These two definitions are significant; the writer wishes to make clear that women are taking up work in order to free themselves from the burden of being provided for, and instead providing for others, or simply supporting themselves. Subjects covered in the series include: teaching in girls' schools; engraving on wood; nursing; medicine as a profession for women; instructress in cookery and, interestingly for the period, campaigning for the parliamentary franchise for women. The articles offer practical advice such as rates of pay and places to gain qualification as well as likely contacts in the field. Equipping themselves for such employments did not seems to be a natural forerunner to actually working in them, but rather a safety net for women who were likely to be forced to have to rely on their own resources:

> Even when such a necessity never occurs, those who qualify themselves to meet it have a great advantage in the calmness with which they can look forward to coming years, in the higher health they enjoy form having regular and interesting

> instead of desultory and aimless occupation, and in the firmness and elevation of character they acquire form pursuing a definite aim for a prolonged period of time.[66]

The pragmatic nature of such articles marked a shift in the magazine's focus in its later years. There were fewer articles on philosophical and historical matters and more on the practicalities of their readers' lives. In Volume 3 of *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* the feature 'Stray Notes' first appeared. 'Stray Notes' informed readers of current events which might be of particular interest to women. The first entry noted that:

> A journal, edited exclusively by women, has been brought out at Lyons; it is called *The Volcano*. Had the name any special significance, we wonder?
>
> On Saturday, the 2nd December, the Bishop of London admitted two ladies to the office of Deaconess, who have passed through a year's training.
>
> Sir Julius Vogel, in his speech to his constituents at Wanganni, stated that he was in favour of extending the franchise to women.[67]

The magazine also began to carry a question and answer series which would pose questions likely to be asked at University Entrance Examinations. The questions were then answered in a later issue, comments being offered for entrants. These additions to the magazine can be seen to be emblematic of a gradual move away from the private and into the public sphere for the members of the Society. More mention is made of the various other organisations that the women were involved with and, as the magazine was now available to a wider audience, this had the effect of publicising their efforts in the wider society.

Conclusion

The community aspect of the earlier incarnation of the magazine had disappeared with the advent of the commercial imperative and the scrutinising of articles to raise the value of the publication. By allowing those who were not members of the Society to

contribute to the magazine the editors were able to demand better quality articles, but this resulted in fewer contributions from genuine members of the Society. Thus the magazine becomes more solely the domain of the editors, as they have the 'power' to choose what is printed. The standard of the magazine was certainly raised around this period but we can assume that some of the earlier writers may have been ostracised, being merely unwanted 'gift horses'.

The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine ceased publication at the end of 1880, the financial problems that had dogged the project from the outset becoming insurmountable. It was suggested that perhaps it could continue as a quarterly publication, or that the Edinburgh Ladies' Educational Association could be brought in to bolster finances. The women's attempt to make the magazine a commercially viable project without regular financial assistance from the members of the Society failed. They decided to discontinue publication and concentrate on the debating aspect of the Society. The Society was renamed The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society. As an early autonomous publishing project, produced and funded entirely by women, the first of its kind in Scotland, the magazines deserve to be better known.

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Chapter Five - The didactic and the practical: the foray into education by The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society

This chapter will look at the developing public lives of the members of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society through their involvement and interest in the debates over education so prevalent at the time. By assessing the Society's attitudes to education and their later activism in the area it is possible to place education at the very heart of the members' move into a public life. Through self-culture the ladies performed a metaphorical move; from educating themselves in their drawing rooms to being educated alongside their peers in the lecture theatre.

The subject of education is highly visible in the periodicals of the time, and was debated in the drawing room, the club, the debating society and the Houses of Parliament. The campaign for increased access to education took many forms; from the quietist approach which campaigned for women's moral education, so that they might be better equipped to quicken the consciences of their men folk, to the virulent campaigns for medical education provision on a par with that of male medics. The manner of the reception of this education was also hotly contested; was it was better to be educated in segregation from men or to share their lecturers and lecture rooms? The subjects that were to be taught were also debated; there seemed little point to some campaigners of allowing women to graduate in medicine or law if they were never to take up posts in hospitals or the high courts. Some argued that an education in the arts and humanities was all that would be 'fitting' for a young lady of means as she would never have to take up a paid position and an arts education would serve to amuse her and her husband's guests.

However, opposition to women entering the public sphere was not insurmountable and many middle class women did make the move. Education was a fiercely debated topic by the middle of the century, particularly the education of the poor and of women. Neither section of the community had any overriding economic imperative to be educated but were rather interested in it for their own sake. The

elementary education of all classes was legislated for in England in 1870 and in Scotland in 1872 but it was not until two decades later that women had full access to higher education. The largely middle class women who campaigned for increased access to education won a war of attrition that was quite unlike that of the suffragette movement of later decades. There was little if any militant action and access to universities was won by the example of what women could achieve in education rather than any teleological argument of where it might lead.

In 1860 Emily Davis, instigator of the first higher education institution for women in Britain, wrote to her daily newspaper to question the legitimacy of the concept of 'separate spheres' for men and women, which had become so pervasive in Victorian society:

> It is averred that 'public life' is injurious to women; they are meant for the domestic... What is meant by it? Is there any woman living who does not go more or less into public... The work of a medical practitioner is scarcely more public than that of a district visitor... the business of a chemist and druggist is no more public than a confectioner... Fathers who would shake their heads at the idea of taking their daughters into their own counting-houses, allow them to stand behind a stall at a bazaar, or to lead off at a charity ball – far more public scenes, and, where indeed, publicity is essential to success.[1]

Davis is drawing attention to the fact that ideals in this period were different to practices. Whilst women were perceived to be purely domestic creatures by many; in the wider society they were actually making some inroads into public life, albeit in a very limited manner. At the forefront of this debate, of public versus private life for women, was the question of education, whether it was education for its own sake or for the sake of the general good. It has been argued that women may have highlighted the feminine and domestic aspect of their roles in society simply for political expediency; it was more likely that they would gain political ground by capitalising on those 'gifts' that society had already conferred upon them. It is important to note here that although many working-class women also campaigned for the right to an education in this period, the campaign for higher education for women was largely a middle and upper class debate.

In her book *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood* Joan N. Burstyn argues that the campaign for higher education for women had more far reaching effects than simply their gaining places in the ivory tower.[2] She suggests that by allowing women to participate in the higher echelons of the Victorian education system, Victorian patriarchs were giving up a deeply held belief of how women should function in society. In achieving degrees and diplomas these women were, Burstyn argues, renouncing the very norm of femininity in the Victorian period. Despite their position in the upper reaches of society those women who campaigned for higher education did in fact challenge the role of women in all society; by challenging an ideal they brought about a change in how women were considered as members of society. Burstyn defends this idea, that the history of a few upper and middle class women could have far-reaching implications for all women in Victorian society, thus:

> It may seem indulgent, therefore, to concentrate on those few hundreds, when the history of millions of women is still unwritten. However, the struggle to obtain higher education has broad implications for all women because Victorian society was hierarchical. The norms for behaviour were set by the ruling classes who came to be identified closely with the upper middle classes. It was they who most eagerly adopted the Victorian ideal of womanhood; and it was they who first discovered its flaws as reality.[3]

As prosperity increased throughout the Victorian period and the middle-classes became more and more affluent the separate spheres of men and women became increasingly pronounced. Middle class wealth meant that they could aspire to the lives and examples set by the upper classes. It became a sign of prosperity and success to have a thoroughly accomplished (and compliant) wife who did not need to concern herself with household chores, as she would be commanding an army of domestic servants to do that work for her. Women's lives became more private; they were not expected to go out to purchase household sundries, unmarried women were chaperoned in public, and working

for a living became the preserve of the poor. The reform of the franchise system in 1832 and 1867 extended men's political power whilst continuing to deny it to women. If separate spheres existed before the Victorian period, they certainly increased in some measure during it. Demographic superfluity of women in relation to men further increased this division of the private and the public sphere. If women were to be hopeful of achieving a husband and thus economic viability then they must be careful not to appear to be outside the realms of the norm and the ideal. Activism, education and lack of domestic accomplishments could carry the smear of the 'bluestocking', an epithet which had to be avoided at all costs.

Before looking at specific women and the part they played in improving the access to education that was in place by the turn of the twentieth century, it is necessary to look at how the situation was in Scotland before the campaigns began. Scotland has always prided itself on its virtuosity in educating its young: higher levels of literacy; more universities per head of population; a more progressive, wide-ranging curriculum in relation to its nearest neighbour (and often rival) England, have often been cited as supporting the claim of a higher standard of education. Since Adam Smith espoused a socially responsible form of education which would benefit all of society for the sake of society, the Scottish education system has espoused an egalitarian, democratic approach. Smith wrote:

> The more they are instructed the less liable they are to the delusions of enthusiasm and superstition, which, among ignorant nations, frequently occasion the most dreadful disorders. An instructed and intelligent people, besides, are always more decent and orderly than an ignorant and stupid one. They feel themselves, each individually, more respectable and more likely to obtain the respect of their lawful superiors. They are more disposed to examine, and more capable of seeing through, the interested complaints of faction and sedition, and they are, upon that account, less apt to be misled into any wanton or unnecessary opposition to the measures of government. In free countries, where the safety of government depends very much upon the favourable judgement which the people may form of its conduct it must surely be of the highest importance that they should not be disposed to judge rashly or capriciously concerning it.[4]

Though Smith does not mention gender in his manifesto for universal education, the Scottish system, especially of the earlier nineteenth century, did not welcome girls, especially into the echelons of further and higher education. Middle-class girls could progress from parish schools to boarding schools, but their lower-class schoolmates had little or no provision for secondary education, they were much more likely to end up in manufactories and domestic service. This was the case until changes in the law governing how children were educated were executed, the most significant being the 1872 Education (Scotland) Act.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century it became usual, then a legal requirement, for all children under the age of twelve to attend school. In reality this statute meant that education for girls was to be normalised, taken for granted. Fees would not be charged to children whose parents could not afford them and it became an offence to withdraw one's child from school. All children were to be taught reading, writing and arithmetic between the ages of five and thirteen. In 1883 the leaving age was raised to fourteen. Many of the new schools that were founded by the new education acts were co-educational and the educationalists of the new Scottish Education Department had to consider whether the curriculum was to be different according to gender. The main obstacle to women became not whether a secondary education was to be open to them but what they were to be taught and whether they would be able to take that education further.

It was more likely, in the period directly following the introduction of universal elementary education in Scotland, that women would begin to challenge their allotted roles and their subordination to men. Rosalind Marshall states:

> Education gave women a new awareness of the world around them. This is to deny neither the intelligence nor the perceptiveness of their predecessors, but the fact remains that if a woman had read something of the condition of women in other countries and at other times, she was more likely to question her own role in a society which had altered dramatically since many of the laws and conventions affecting her had come not into being.[5]

Being educated in the same classes and playing in the same playgrounds, the girls of the late nineteenth century could not fail to see that there was no discernible reason why they should be treated differently from their male classmates. Literacy and education played a major role in the sea-change that occurred in the last decades of the century that encouraged women and girls to challenge the outmoded position that had been allotted to them. However, there were those that maintained that education could have a pernicious effect on young girls, physically and psychologically.[6] Despite the fact that their education was now a legal requirement, as late as 1901 it was possible to be seen to be *too* clever, as this passage from *The People's Friend* entitled, 'Girl's who don't marry' makes clear:

> Finally, there is a girl with a superabundance of brains. Not necessarily the highly-educated girl, but with brains of that order which produces an overplus of common sense – the girl who is unwomanly wise. No doubt, from the strictly marriageable point of view, brains are a mistake. (...) The thoughtful girl, when she takes to learning, develops into the blue-stocking, and blue-stockings are seldom wed. (...) A man grows up under conditions in which his superiority to women is inferred, and, it hurts and puzzles him to find that one of the 'weaker sex', as he delights to call them, thinks more or knows more than he does, or can even think as well.[7]

There is no irony intended. Whilst this censorship of reading and curtailment of entertainment was afflicting the middle-class young ladies, the lower-classes were in a greater predicament and unlikely to repel men by the wealth of their education. Once they had completed their formal education (to the age of fourteen) lower-class girls would undoubtedly seek employment in domestic service, as farm-workers or in factories.

Writing about education in the magazines of the Society

Even amongst the wealthy, middle-class women that joined the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society there was much disparity of opinion as to how women should be educated, or indeed, whether they should be at all. Although participation in the

Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society could have been seen as an attempt to self-educate through a course of reading and writing, albeit in a supportive environment that did not censure or create barriers (other than those of class), the women also had a particular interest in education from a more general perspective. They showed their interest both didactically through articles on 'How to Read' and 'What to Read' and more philosophically on debate topics such as 'Should education be compulsory?'. These two interests were combined in their campaigns for women's entrance to higher education and through their setting up of St. George's School and The Edinburgh School of Cookery. To follow these didactic and philosophical concerns about education, and specifically women's education, it is necessary to trace the members' attitudes through the pages of *The Attempt* and *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* and how they addressed the issue in their debates.

An analysis of the earlier years of the magazine shows that attitudes towards further and higher education for women were more ambivalent than those printed in later issues. In this earlier period there is no homogeneity of editorial voice on the subject of female education. Later there are fewer and fewer articles condemning the concept of education out of hand, although many writers still see points of contention. The major argument against the rolling out of higher education to all sectors of society was that women were inherently unsuited to the pursuit of education. Some agreed that once admission to higher education was granted, women, whose place was in the home, would have no need for their newly acquired learning. Alongside these negative views were updates on the campaign in Edinburgh, in the rest of Scotland, and the more advanced movement in England. The magazines also feature the experiences of those who attended the university classes and who were engaged in correspondence courses to achieve university entrance level. The homogeneity of these later voices is testament to the fact that the issue of education for women was at the heart of the women's movement at this very early stage. It is frequently reiterated in these articles that 'Knowledge is power';

women were very evidently beginning to fight for the right to the power that men already held as a matter of course.

Perhaps most striking to the modern reader is the virulent arguments these writers could make against female higher education. Writing as they did in a woman edited journal, written for women by women, it is difficult for us to understand why they would not want, at least *access*, to education even if they did not wish to take up that opportunity. This anti-movement also gives a clear indication of the controversy surrounding this issue. The major argument 'against' was that women were just not suited to education, that their place was in the home, and their sphere was the private and domestic rather than the public and civic. The 'separate spheres' argument was pervasive and popular; it seemed almost a reversal of natural progress to allow women to toil and to study for their living or their edification.

Ambivalent views

At least in the early years of the Society members expressed ambivalent views over the question of education and the place of women within it. These undecided views will be discussed below and followed by a consideration of their more mature opinions as the campaign for women's education diversified and members of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society contributed to the debate in a more practical manner.

Some writers argued that this issue had split womanhood itself. Writing under the title 'A Plea for Stupid People' *Dido* explains:

> O loud-tongued, learned, logical ladies, advocates of women's right! Great is your eloquence, weighty are your arguments, many are your disciples, - as you are great, we implore you to be merciful; go your way with clamour and triumph let us go ours in peace and quiet; spare us a few specimens of the 'silly girl' whose faith is stronger than her reason, whose affections are more developed than her abilities; whose eyes sparkle at the prospect of a ball, and who is not ashamed of longing for a new bonnet; who goes into paroxysms of admiration at the sight of a baby, and cries her eyes out over her favourite novel; who will carry water in a sieve, 'if papa wishes it', and believes 'black is white' 'because my husband

> tells me so'. Do not exterminate from the face of the earth this creature, so loveable in the eyes of many, so harmless in the eyes of all spare us her, and we will overlook a large portion of the trouble and annoyance you inflict upon the rest of the world.[8]

The derisive tone of the piece is sustained throughout so it is impossible for the reader to discern what the writer actually believes on this issue. However, it is clear that the writer does hold some affection for the vision of womanliness that she portrays. The 'womanly' qualities of attention to dress, love of children, sentimentality and deference to her male relatives are regarded as being under attack by the encroachment of educated women. Although this piece is almost certainly satirical the writer is able to split women into two instantly recognisable stereotypes for her readers. That these stereotypes exist is proof that the debate was concerned not just with higher education but with the role of women in society and whether they had any right to equality with men.

Other writers suggest that the unnaturalness of female education lies not in their essential 'girlish' nature but in the fact that their minds should be on matters higher than earthly attainments:

> Years bring the gradual change from the child into the woman. Vague imaginings shape themselves into earnest thoughts. She begins to know herself and all things around her in a truer sense than ever before. (...) Dreams of ambition grow pale in the strong light, and self seems dwarfed by contrast with the new world she now sees; but what of that, as long as she tastes the delight of looking upwards to what is infinitely higher than herself, and more glorious than all she has ever dreamed of.[9]

Age and religious conversion are linked in this piece, the suggestion being that women grow out of the need for education quicker than men as they grow into their new role as moral arbiters. This role of domestic sainthood saw a revival in the temperance movement later in the century and is allied to the philanthropic work that was expected of affluent Victorian ladies.

The concept of biological determinism, that each sex has allotted roles established by their physical and mental make-up, was a potent notion in the argument

against women's education. Citing this physical reason, commentators were able to assert that education was just not suitable for 'ladies'. Elsie Strivelyne, one of the most prolific writers in *The Attempt*, when writing on women's essential nature argues:

> Once more we assert that this finer and more thorough teaching will only fit them more completely for all position they may be called on to fill; they need never step into man's province, their own is wide enough; but at least they should be taught to do justice to their natural work and to themselves, for, as one of them has said, 'Education is, after all, only what its etymology implies – the educing, the drawing out of the powers of the individual. If we then draw out a woman's power, we only educe our womanliness; we cannot give her a man's powers any more than we can give a man a woman's brilliancy of intuition, or any other gift. We can only educe her God-given woman's nature, and so make her a more perfect woman.[10]

Elsie Strivelyne is not here arguing against education *per se* but suggesting that men and women need education for different reasons. Further to this she argues that education can never make women like men, can never confer upon them 'man's power'. Again this discussion is concerned with the retaining of the practice of 'separate spheres'; the writer suggests that women 'need never step into man's province'. Distinct provinces for men and women are, for this writer, the ideal, where labour is divided along sex lines. Certainly she does not belittle women in her thesis; she attaches to them the power of intuition and argues that this power is 'God-given'. Furthermore, Elsie Strivelyne is arguing for a delineation of sex roles along 'natural' lines. By this suggestion she juxtaposes women's natural intuition with a 'synthetic' education, that would be unnecessary if the natural was heeded. Thus she suggests that to educate women beyond their sphere is not just to tamper with the natural division of society but to contend with God Himself. Caught up in the rhetoric of Divine Right the reader is forced to at least agree tacitly with the writer's position.

Other writers who suggest that the strict division of society (at least middle-class society) is necessary if both the public and domestic are to function smoothly embellish Elsie Strivelyne's approach. For a woman to educate herself into the sphere of men can only produce havoc at home:

> Does it not appear fitting that when the man of business returns to his home in the evening, worn and exhausted, there should be there one ready to meet him half-way in the effort to throw off the burden of the day, and in higher and fairer realms of thought to live. (...) Should such an one have much to do with the duties of a profession? Should she, too, be coming in at the same hour as the man of business, equally heavy-laden with care and weariness, ignorant of the state of her household? And should they discuss together the probably tough beef, and the still tougher topics of the day, unsoothed by aught that is harmonious, innocently childlike, or softly beautiful? But let us close the door on this topic also, before it looms before us in all its many-sided aspects.[11]

The writer shies away from the discussion of the division of labour; its 'many-sided aspects' are too much with which to contend. She may support female education but cannot reconcile the problems that it may herald for the regulation of society. Furthermore, she suggests that the domestic sphere would collapse if women were to be out of the home educating themselves. This would result in domestic disharmony: 'tough beef' and 'tough topics'. J. Menzies is suggesting here that women are required in household settings as *regulators*, controlling the discussion in a feminine manner through 'innocence' and ' harmony'.

Joan Burstyn argues that as well as a social imperative (it was a symbol of wealth to be able to provide for a wife to be idle and enough servants to run one's household) there was a financial imperative to this doctrine of 'separate spheres':

> Learning interfered with the functioning of intuition because it trained women to reason. A learned woman, therefore, lost the very essence of her femininity. As marriage was woman's vocation, a girl's training had to enhance not diminish her femininity. No father wanted to be accused of educating his daughter so as to make her unsuited to marriage and motherhood; better to ignore the possibility of her remaining unmarried and in need of supporting herself than to run the risk that her very education would make her an old maid.[12]

Thus some of the commentators made it clear that women were only to be educated for this public sphere if to do so was necessary for their economic survival or because they will serve the public need for some area that only their expertise can supply. These writers did not advocate women's higher education purely on the grounds that men have

access to it, nor on the grounds that to do so would bring about the refinement of their sex:

> If those who desire to come forward in public, do so because they believe they have a work to do which they could not do so well in any other way, we have no right to hold them back. But, if they are urged on only by a longing after personal advancement, or by the mistaken belief that they will thus promote the elevation of their sisters... I cannot help feeling that the greater their success, the greater will be the injury inflicted on themselves and on their whole sex.[13]

In keeping with their role of arbiters of morality and sense, women could only be permitted access to education if it was to bring about betterment to society. Indeed, to want education for its own sake was to act immorally, elevating the personal above the collective good. Even amongst the most prominent advocates for women's higher education in Britain the role of the private sphere could not be neglected. In biographies and autobiographies of the leading lights of the movement, domestic feats are sure to be mentioned. In a biography of Mrs Crudelius, founder of the Edinburgh Association for the University Education of Women, it is written:

> Mrs Crudelius was of a lively temper and ready conversation. In her domestic and social duties she was entirely exemplary, not unconscious perhaps of the strong weapon furnished to the enemies of her sex by every woman who neglects the minutiae of duty for what some may suppose higher or wider interests.[14]

Whilst her biographer may be highlighting Mrs Crudelius domestic strengths in order to evade the comments of 'the enemies of her sex' it is clear that to her and her biographer to neglect the domestic was to go against some natural function. To disregard the private sphere was to put any advancement in the public sphere in jeopardy, leaving Mrs Crudelius the onerous task of both ministering to her husband and home, and campaigning for social justice. It is not then surprising that so many of the members of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society and of the related Edinburgh Association for the Higher Education of Women remained unmarried. Perhaps it would have been too difficult to fight on both fronts.

In spite of the complexity of women's attitudes towards their own higher education many of the most vociferous condemnations of the project were to come from men. In the universities themselves professors and lecturers argued against the teaching of women, especially in mixed classes. Most of all they disapproved of medical education for women. Some argued that it was biologically impossible for women to study to the level that universities required, and even that women's higher education could endanger the progression of humankind. T.S. Coulston M.D. gave two lectures to the Philosophical Institution of Edinburgh on the subject in 1882, he argued:

> Even suppose it is granted that it was a good thing for a woman that her brain should contain all the book knowledge that many women educationalists demand, this good thing might by altogether counterbalanced if the labour of acquiring it stopped on inch of growth, or diminished the joy and satisfaction of life on iota. If the men of the future were to suffer and be degenerate through it in the faintest degree, then it would be radically bad.[15]

As the campaign gathered steam these less ambivalent views become more prevalent; people began to have polarised views on women's access to education. And the campaign for the project became more practical and less philosophical in nature.

Practical campaigns for women's education

Notwithstanding the negative views that surrounded them both within and without the Society some of the members played a very active part in the campaign for the conferment of degrees on women. They also worked for a more equal elementary and secondary education for younger girls. This positive view of education for women is fully represented in the magazines with an increasingly assertive slant on the movement in later issues of the magazine. Indeed, the final issues of *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* reported all of the developments in the campaign from the rest of the country and some international views of women's education were featured. The work done in Edinburgh is naturally given prominence and later issues carry first hand reports of the experience of

students at the university classes. Indeed we can assume that many of those who attended the classes were aware at least of the existence of the magazine. In Volume 2 of *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* a new 'Question Series' is instigated which provides questions and invites answers on topics that are likely to appear on university courses. Students of these courses are invited to reply and prizes can be won. In the 'Stray Notes' section too, the topic of education is prevalent; whilst small notes on classes are included there is also a regular feature of a book swap enabling students to exchange textbooks which were no longer needed. In this way the magazine functioned almost as a Student's Union publication, regulating and supporting its student members. This development of the Society follows the general move to more practical campaigning for higher education for women. There is more of a focus on enabling women in their educational pursuits rather than the more didactic discussion that featured in early issues of the magazine. Here self-education seems to be becoming more communal and for the general good.

One of the principal features of articles in the magazines that extol the virtues of female higher education is that they encourage women to become involved in their own education. In one such article J. Menzies uses the language of war to rally her readers:

> The higher education of women in this country may, in its progress up to the present time, be called an almost purely democratic movement. No munificent grant form the Crown has come to its aid; no generous hand has been held out to help it to a solid footing among the institutions of the country. It has forged its own weapons, used its own secret watchword, and upheld its own standard. It is as yet too infantine, too useless, to interest the State at all. Hitherto, it would be easier to crush it than to help it. Then surely there is room for anxiety about its future; and how can this be allayed? Every women can help, and how? First by educating herself. In this way she can swell the ranks of highly cultured women, and bring nearer the day when their influence will be felt throughout society as widely as it ought to be.[16]

The female readers are asked to 'swell the ranks' and told that the movement already has 'its own weapons' and 'secret watchword' and it holds 'its own standard'. The goal that these women are fighting for is 'influence' and it is interesting that the writer thinks the only way to secure it is to *fight*. Whilst those unsure of the benefits of female education

valorise the women's influence in the domestic sphere, the writer of this article dismisses this. She believes that the only influence worth a fight is that in the public sphere and the only way to achieve it is through educating herself and becoming 'highly cultured'. It is not too fanciful to suggest that women like J. Menzies may have decided that it might be politic to adopt male 'fighting talk' to procure the position in society that men were already enjoying. This shows a development of ideas by J. Menzies, in her earlier essay 'On Objects pursued by Women' (quoted above) she regarded the neglect of the domestic by women pursuing education as to be the greatest argument against its proliferation. However, by the time she writes 'On Local Examinations for Women' this worry seems to have disappeared.[17] The writer seems proud that the movement for higher education has received no outside help from the State, and that it is democratic. The community aspect of the movement mirrors the community aspect already discussed in the writing of the magazine and in the staging of the debates of the Ladies Edinburgh Debating Society. To act in a supportive environment outside the influence of men, to act without 'help' is a recurring theme. Despite the fact that men, mainly professors from the universities did help the women, the organisation and scope of the movement was managed wholly by women. The members of the Society and of the Educational Association made the move from private to public sphere without recourse to the existing hierarchy in place and in their terms enacted a 'democratic' manoeuvre.

Perhaps most interestingly, the later issues of the magazine give first-hand accounts of the experience of university education for women. For the most part they discuss the difficulty of attempting to educate oneself in isolation and their need for guidance and escape from a 'desultory' reading programme:

> Unless some competent adviser is at hand, how can a girl know which books to select, still more, which parts of these to leave unread, and which to study closely?[18]
> I read all sorts of books. Pope told me that 'women had no characters at all', and were best defined as 'black, brown, or fair'. Milton seemed to have considered my great mother as unfit to talk with even an affable archangel! On the other hand, the 'modish' existence of a gentlewoman seemed to enjoin a *dolce far*

> *niente* life upon such as myself, since modern inventions had taken from us much of the household work which fell to the share of our grandmothers; and so, with a quiet conscience, I took to my books again – to those books which I had come to look upon as the 'silent friends that ever please' – and resolved to be content. (...) I worked hard, but my work was desultory, and my efforts were scattered over too many subjects. (...) in the outside world the education of women had meanwhile undergone a rapid revolution. I hear of ladies who were at work preparing for University examinations – of Local Centres established here and there – and of scholarships that might be won. Little schoolgirls put me to the blush by their thorough understanding of the beginning of learning. (...) My past seemed purposeless, my learning bore the stamp of no University brand, nor in an emergency was it likely to possess any marketable value. My very books had been false friends! What then was I to do?[19]

What the writer was 'to do' and indeed, what she did, was to enrol in the correspondence course that the Educational Association initiated, achieving a similar education to those in Edinburgh could achieve but at some distance. The ELEA provided for this need of guidance. Indeed, the movement's progression can be seen in the light of this regulation of reading habits; women began by joining the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society in order to discuss the books they had read with like-minded people. Later they may have written for the magazine that initially had a small supportive readership, which encouraged peer review and was subsequently published publicly. Still later they may have joined the ELEA and enrolled in its university classes, leading perhaps to the conferment of a degree. Whilst not all of the women involved with these groups followed this path many did, if they required regulation of reading and improvement of their self-education then it was provided by the groups outlined in this thesis.

Alongside these views, both positive and negative, of the progress being made in women's education provision, the magazine also featured articles on the practical work being done to bring about this progress. In particular it focussed on the Edinburgh Ladies' Educational Association (later known as The Edinburgh Association for the Higher Education of Women) which had strong ties with the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society. Recounting the history of the Educational Society is pertinent here because it

illuminates the women's commitment not just to the rhetoric of a fair higher education for women but also to its practice.

The history of women's attainment of university degrees in Britain is a complex one. In 1965 Josephine Kamm wrote in one of the early histories of the movement that, 'Britain blazed no trail'; most of the work to raise awareness of women's right to higher education began in Scandinavia and Australasia.[20] Whilst it is simple to plot the chronology of universities conferring degrees on women the progress of the movement is more complex. Some universities offered university type courses well before they conferred degrees, others allowed women to sit in on classes and take women-only examinations, almost all of the universities granted medical degrees long after they began to grant degrees in the humanities. In Britain the first university to admit women to its degree courses was the University of London (but not to students of medicine) in 1878. University College London pronounced itself to be the first coeducational higher institution in the same year. In Scotland entry to the four Scottish Universities was granted through legislative change in 1889 and 1892.

The Edinburgh Ladies' Educational Association (ELEA) was set up in 1868 amid the great controversy of Sophia Jex-Blake's campaign for entry to the medical faculty of Edinburgh University by women undergraduates. Amidst this furore the ELEA intended to steer round controversy in order to secure higher education for women in all faculties. They did so, not by any militant campaign, but by setting up university-style classes and lectures, taught by lecturers wearing gowns which would show by example that women were capable and suited to higher education. The first women's educational association for women of its kind in Scotland the ELEA was conservative in its demands, embodying some of the ambivalence towards women's education exhibited above from *The Attempt* and *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine*. They stated their purpose in their first report:

> It is not the aim of the Association to train for the professions; but its promoters desire in the education of women to give them the advantages of a system acknowledged to be well suited for the mental training of the other sex.[21]

Again it is stated that by educating women they are not intending to threaten the professional status of men. By suggesting that the education that they would receive would serve no purpose other than to tax and to expand their mental faculties the women are able to forestall any disagreement on the grounds of the dissolution of the 'separate spheres' of men and women.

Teaching women in isolation from men and allowing them to go in for special 'ladies' certificates' fell short of the ideal that many feminists had envisaged. Emily Davis, founder of Girton College, wrote to the ELEA in 1872 'expressing her alarm over the injurious effects of setting up a separate standard for women'.[22] Yet as Sheila Hamilton has argued, this uncontroversial approach which offered no risk to the university and even had its professors on the executive committee, helped to soothe those who had been angered by the earlier virulent campaigns for women's medical education.[23] There is little evidence in the Association's reports of any hysterical outbursts or frontal attacks on the University and little reference to the medical campaign whose fiery activists like Sophia Jex-Blake reigned. There was a conscious attempt to steer clear of any controversy whatsoever and to make steady, if less spectacular, progress.

One of the most effective ways of 'steering clear' of controversy was to enlist the university's own staff in the campaign. Professor Masson of the Rhetoric and English Literature Department was the first Professor to be enlisted in the teaching of women's classes. A highly respected scholar and liberal supporter of women's rights he became the mouthpiece and respectable face of the movement in Scotland. In 1867 he had written in *Macmillan's Magazine*:

> The women of this country ought to be educated or to have the option of being educated at the same institutions as the men, up to the very highest, with the same gradation, by the same teachers, and in a manner as thorough, continuous and systematic. Till this is done our nation is unjust to half its members and exists

> spiritually, intellectually and in every other respect at but half its possible strength.[24]

Professor Masson's daughter, Flora, was one of the first three women graduates of the ELEA's university classes, alongside Margaret Mitchell and Charlotte Carmichael, who was later to be the mother of Marie Stopes. Both Flora Masson and Charlotte Carmichael were members of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society. The board of the ELEA also had a complement of the Society's members. Indeed, the two societies became linked as their membership was largely conjoined. Sarah Siddons Mair wrote the foreword to *After the Dawn* a near contemporaneous account of the work of the ELEA, in it she noted:

> The Edinburgh Ladies' Association for the University Education of Women, the St. George's Hall Classes, St George's College, St George's School were, all of them, our main interest throughout the many years.[25]

The writer of the main account of the ELEA, Beatrice Welsh, specifically names the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society as the site for the beginning of the movement and the interest in higher and further education. Education began, for Welsh, not in the classroom but in the Society:

> ...a Society which for seventy years was a training school for women, their debates preparing them to be excellent public speakers, their essays 'reflecting the growth of what might be called the Renaissance of Woman and the gradual development of her outlook and sympathies and ever-widening influence upon the problems and public opinions of those days.[26]
>
> Almost from the beginning great interest was shown in the movement for Higher Education of Women, and at one of the early meetings of the Society Mrs Crudelius made an appeal for the University Education of Women – and the long campaign opened...[27]

The close links between the ELEA and the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society are evident from articles in both *The Attempt* and *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine*. These articles stress the close ties between the two organisations and seem comfortable with the debates surrounding higher education. Writing on the ELEA in volume 7 of *The*

Attempt, Lutea Reseda writes about the Association's unwillingness to be caught up in controversy:

> The ladies have done nothing rashly; they have carefully felt their way, for the morning was dark and the path untried when they first went forth on their mission.[28]

Later in the same article she writes that women should be encouraged to study the sciences, a topic that was important to the ELEA:

> The education of women has always seemed to me to have proceeded upon a false principle; their natural tastes are fostered, their very defects are increased by their ordinary showy and superficial education; that value of instruction by which it becomes the complement of our tastes is forgotten; what we most need, we are left utterly without. If we require anything more than another to make up to us our natural deficiencies, it is a thorough study of the exact sciences. Exactitude, brevity, close and uncoloured reasoning we do not find so natural to us as language, music, drawing; then, by all means, let us get ourselves indoctrinated with them.[29]

An insiders' view of the campaign for women's higher education is also suggested by Lutea Reseda when she writes of the difficulties of wanting to gain an education and of the obstacles in her way:

> It is a test to all its members. Not fashion leads women there, for it is not fashionable; not professional prospects, for to none (as yet) is a way opened through its gates; not parental authority, for this is beyond the prescribed routine of the world's ways; not duty, in the narrow meaning of the word. This may have degrees; it may be only love of occupation; a recognition of the grand truth, that 'God, in cursing, gives us better gifts than man in benediction'; but all love is not at first sight, and the deepest affection grows slowly upon acquaintance; yet, with many at the outset, it is a love of knowledge for its own sake; a search after truth, a straining after wisdom.[30]

The difficulties of embarking on a higher education when the norm for women was a domestic life are delineated here. Passages like this are particularly useful as they are first hand accounts of what obstacles women saw before them. Lutea Reseda describes the quest for higher education as a 'curse' and cites fashion, prospects, parents, and duty as being against the woman who wants to go to university.

Writers for the magazines are not only concerned with the situation in Scotland but also have witnessed campaigns for the higher education of women in other parts of

the country. Lutea Reseda writes again in Volume 3 of *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* of the differences between the Scottish and English crusades:

> While spending last winter in the south, I tried more than ever to find out the causes that keep Scotland lagging so much behind England in the advancement of the higher education of women. No doubt, in our own country, many women *desire* the highest education, and contrive to *get it* to a degree that could bear favourable comparison with any English results. (...) Does it depend on the latent conservatism said to be inherent in every Scot, even the most liberal; or upon their greater distance form the centre of impulse?[31]

The later addition of editorial comment through the column 'Stray Notes' meant that announcements could be made if there were any advancements of the movement in other parts of the country; these were met with praise and a little caution. The caution perhaps bears out Lutea Reseda's claim that the Scottish campaign was inherently conservative:

> Those who are interested in the higher education of women cannot but see cause for rejoicing in the issue of the convocation of the London University on Tuesday the 15th January. By a majority of 110, the University was empowered to grant degrees to women in all the Faculties alike. Gentlemen who are interested in other Faculties besides the medical one, had ample opportunity of putting their veto upon the 'arrogant claims of ambitious women'. But the list of those in the minority has been found to consist chiefly of medical men; and of such men there were even on or two who spoke in favour of the charter, and tried to combat the strong prejudice entertained against it by Sir William Jenner. The *Daily News*, a few days before, had some very sensible remarks on the subject, thinking it highly desirable, for many reasons, that women should have an opportunity given them of showing what they can do. (...) While the women of Britain can only praise the liberality of spirit which has supplied their education with such a perfect test, it remains for them to justify that liberality by showing that its ground of decision was not a mistaken one.[32]

Debates on education

The importance accorded to women's education by the Society is evident in their choice of topics of debate. Statistics showing the prevalence of education as a topic are particularly useful as they span the whole of the Society's life span rather than just the period in which the magazines were published. Education was a persistent issue of

debate, unlike some more voguish discussions such as women's enfranchisement and the First World War; the topic was never far from the debating room. Indeed education was the subject of the first debate of the Society in June 1867 'Is boarding school education superior to education at home?' which was defeated. As figure 2 shows, when expressed as a percentage of the debates the subject of education figures between 3 and 19% of the debates as a whole, if spread across a five-year period. The percentage of debates on education remains fairly constant, although it peaks in the period 1877-1881 and at the turn of the century, and troughs in the 1920s. Peaks can be explained by the introduction of a universal education system and interest by the Society in higher education for women in the 1870s and the achievement of degrees by women in the last decade of the nineteenth century encouraging debate over the topic. The trend for less debates about education towards the end of the Society's duration (except the high prevalence in its last decade) can be explained by increased access to education (making the subject less of a 'debate'), the First World War and the concentration of the women's campaign on the achievement of the franchise.

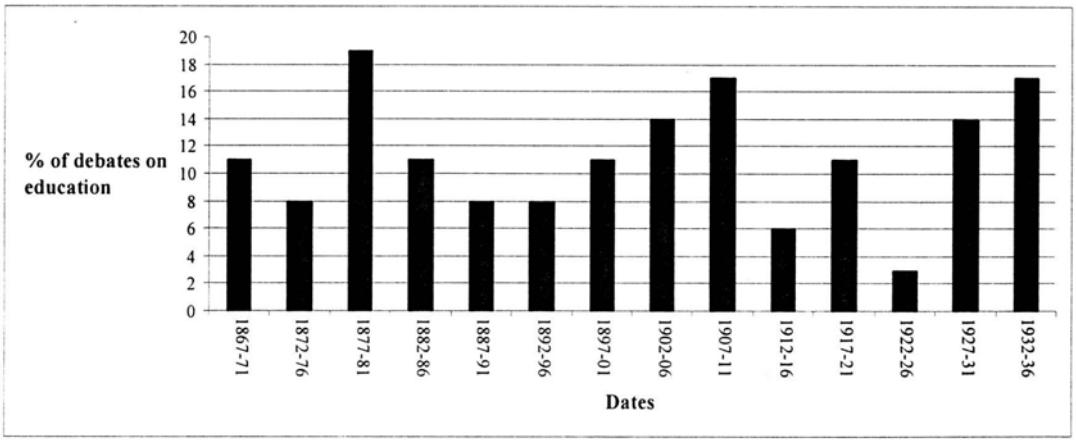

Figure 2: Percentage of debates concerning education.

Some of the debates seem to have been the direct impetus to reform. In 1886 the debate, 'Is it advisable that a training college for women intending to teach in secondary

schools and private families be founded in Edinburgh?' the vote was carried 18 to 1 and in the very same year members of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society founded St George's Training College. There is also evidence that the debates galvanised support for issues that some of the members of the Society were involved in. In January 1882 the debate 'Are the reforms proposed for the Scotch Universities desirable?' was carried unanimously.

Secondary and Further Education

The members of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society did not only practise their educative zeal on the higher education process; they were also interested in secondary and further education for women and girls. Activism in one area of education naturally led to interest in another; most of these women campaigners were involved with several educational reform organisations. Perhaps the two most prominent women in these educational reforms and local politics were the Stevenson sisters, Flora and Louisa. As wealthy spinsters they had the leisure and ability to be involved with most of the movements surrounding women's rights in Edinburgh at the time. Both women were members of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society and founder members of the Edinburgh Ladies' Educational Association. Flora was a pioneer of the Edinburgh Women's Suffrage Society, one of the first of its kind in Britain when it was founded in 1867. Her sister, Louisa, joined too. Flora was on the first school board in Edinburgh in 1873, which was seen as a coup by many women's campaigners as it was a democratically elected post which gave equal status to men and women. Both were active in the Society for the Promotion of the Employment of Women. In 1873 both sisters subscribed to the opening of the Edinburgh School of Domestic Economy.[33]

The teaching of Domestic Economy in Schools was one area of Victorian feminist activity that is discussed less today. The founding of colleges that would teach

domestic subjects to women and the regulation of such subjects at school-level was a major element of these women's campaigning activity. As Helen Corr has suggested:

> ...during the 1880s it [domestic science] held a different meaning for feminists who saw the study of domestic subjects as a route to increase the status of women's work in the overlapping spheres of the home and in public education.[34] An enduring hope was that some knowledge of the culinary arts would help to reduce infant mortality, drunkenness, and bad household management in workers' homes.[35]

Thus the valorisation of women's domestic tasks as subjects worthy of study became linked with the philanthropic zeal that some of these women demonstrated elsewhere. By studying housework in school and by setting up colleges devoted to the teaching of such subjects (where future teachers of domestic science could learn their trade); working class ineptitude and women's lowly status could be dealt a crushing blow.

Without the impetus for further education that access to universities can give, girls' secondary schooling was also far behind that of boys. The Edinburgh campaigners began with university education partly for their own sake, so that they could benefit, and partly because without the stimulus that its promise could give there seemed little need to reform girls' earlier learning. By 1888 it had become clear that there was a lack of basic education that girls could take with them to the St. George Hall Classes and the classes of the ELEA. Girls who had the ability to learn at university level were hampered by an uneven former education. Educated by accomplished governesses who knew much of drawing and music and little of geography and the sciences, or former inmates of boarding and religious schools which had their own agendas, many girls were not in possession of the broad, wide-ranging education that they would need as undergraduates.

At this time those involved with both the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society and the Edinburgh Ladies' Educational Association began to formulate plans for a new school which would give a good, thorough, basic education similar to that acquired by boys in the Edinburgh Merchant Schools. They formed a five-strong committee to

investigate the funding and provision of such a school; all of them were members of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society:

> Margaret Houldsworth, 'too quiet to join in the debates'; Miss Robertson, 'frail and often in ill-health'; Anne Dundas, 'charming, artistic, and cultivated, and an enthusiastic supporter of the Higher Education Movement'; Mary Jane Urquhart, 'a keen and clever debater, strangely conservative in politics' and renowned for her hats; and the Society's nineteen year old founder-president, Sarah Siddons Mair.[36]

Further to the setting up of St. George's school in 1886, Miss Walker, Miss Houldsworth, Miss S.E.S. Mair, and Miss Urquhart, founded St. George's College as a training college for teachers. Thus by the time women were awarded equal degrees to men in Edinburgh this small band of women had provided a comprehensive education for girls and young women encouraging them to educate themselves to the same stage as their male peers.

Conclusion

Members of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society were active at all levels of the campaign for women's education. They instigated new ways of achieving education and participated in these new forums themselves. Through both a sense of philanthropy and perhaps an amount of self-interest they were able to galvanise (in association with other groups) the provision of education in Edinburgh and to ensure that future generations would be able to have access to an education that they were denied. It has been argued that this educative zeal had its roots in the original society, where although the onus was on writing and debating this formed an unofficial education for these women who had been denied a state-regulated schooling. This chapter has shown that the interest in all kinds of education was widespread amongst these women, although that interest is sometimes ambivalent. There is a discernible loss of ambivalence concerning questions of education as the campaign became more embedded and as the women became involved in practical methods of educating young women. Working closely with

the Edinburgh Ladies' Educational Association the women used a conservative, non-militant approach to the attainment of university degrees and good secondary schooling for girls and young women. This assessment of the educative pursuits of these women serves as a model for looking at reading groups and women's societies as unofficial and self-regulating sources of education. Outside state-sanctioned higher education but eager to learn more than they had from elementary school or governesses these women fashioned their own curricula. Later they extended the benefits they received in their own niche to other women by campaigning for a similar education within the public structure. During this period the women discussed moved their education from the private to the public sphere and facilitated that move for many more hundreds of women in Scotland.

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[16] J. Menzies, 'On Local Examinations for Women', *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* 2, (1876), 83-93 (p. 83).

[17] J. Menzies, *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* 2, (1876), 61-41 & 83-93.

[18] [n.a.], 'On Instruction by Correspondence', *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* 2, (1876), 316-20, (p. 316).

[19] M, 'Experiences of Corresponding Students', *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* 3, (1877), 347-52 (p.347).

[20] Josephine Kamm, *Hope Deferred: Girls' Education in English History* (London, [n. pub.] 1965), p. 268.

[21] '1st report ELEA', in Burton, (appendix).

[22] Carol Dyhouse, *No Distinction of Sex? Women in British Universities, 1870-1935* (London: UCL Press, 1995).

[23] Sheila Hamilton, 'The First Generation of University Women, 1869-1930', in *Four Centuries of Edinburgh University Life 1583-1983*, ed. by Gordon Donaldson (Edinburgh:Edinburgh University Press, 1983), 99-115.

[24] Prof. David Masson, 'London University and London Colleges and Schools of Science', *Macmillan's Magazine* 16, (1867), p.432.

[25] B.W. Welsh, *After the Dawn: A Record of the Pioneer Work in Edinburgh for the Education of Women* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1939).

[26] Welsh, p. 1.

[27] Welsh, p. 2.

[28] Lutea Reseda, 'The Edinburgh Ladies' Educational Association', *The Attempt* 7, (1871), 97-101 (p. 98).

[29] Lutea Reseda, p. 99.

[30] Lutea Reseda, p. 98.

[31] Lutea Reseda, 'The Higher Education of Women in Scotland', *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* 3, (1878), 7-14 (p. 7).

[32] The editors, 'Stray Notes – April', *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* 4, (1879), 191-92 (p.191).

[33] Helen Corr, 'Home-rule in Scotland: The Teaching of Housework in Schools, 1872-1914', in *Girls in their Prime – Scottish Education Revisited*, ed. by M.S. Paterson and Judith Fewell, (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1990), 38-53 (pp. 42-43).

[34] Corr, p. 38.

[35] Corr, p. 41.

[36] Nigel Shepley, *Women of Independent Mind: St George's School, Edinburgh and the Campaign for Women's Education 1888-1988* (Edinburgh: St George's School for Girls (inc.), 1988), p. 4.

Chapter Six - From Separate Sphere to Borderlands: the public activities of members of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society

Whilst the core activities that the members of the Society were engaged in have been discussed in earlier chapters and the ways that these core activities brought them into wider society outlined; they were also active in a number of other areas of Victorian society. These were liminal areas of Victorian life, that women were able to enter without censure and subsequently exploit for their public attributes and were at the very centre of the Victorian women's movement. As precursors to high profile campaigns of the later women's movement, these borderland spheres allowed Victorian women to test their mettle and to explore public life in as full a way as they were able. The spheres where they did this investigation are diverse, but amongst the women of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society they formed four main areas: writing for publication; pushing the boundaries of religious worship; campaigning for women's entry into various labour markets; and, of course, early campaigns for women's enfranchisement. These arenas will be analysed here beginning with a consideration of the role of women's clubs and their special nature as a catalyst for women's participation in public life. These areas can be identified as sections of 'public life' where women were more likely to have, at least partial, access. They were 'borderlands' where women could conflate the concept of the public and private and in doing so attempt to evade censure. Moreover, these four areas: membership of clubs; attendance at church; the increase of women workers; and the suffrage question, have been chosen as they represent the questions and arenas outside of the 'women's sphere' in which the members of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society had either more influence or interest. This is borne out by their reference to them in the magazines of the Society, in their debates and through their practical work in the community.

It is unlikely that the members of Society were involved in just one campaigning club, group or society. Indeed, it would be unusual for a socially active Victorian woman not to be a member of several such organisations. As Philippa Levine has noted:

> These multiple organisational commitments suggest both the sheer quantity of time, money and energy which women were willing to invest in the movement and, of course, qualitatively, a feminist philosophy which made links between seemingly disparate issues.[1]

Indeed, in records of the philanthropic, social and political committees that existed in Victorian and Edwardian Edinburgh certain members of the Society's names appear again and again. And it is not uncommon for several members of the same family to share this reforming zeal. This familial connection has been documented by Noel Annan for the links between the 'intellectual aristocracy' in England but little work come to light on such links in Scotland.[2] Certainly the Stevensons, Mairs, and Massons follow Annan's theoretical trajectory, each had links to reform movements in the Victorian period and to feminist organisations in the twentieth century. Levine posits that these close relations at the beginning of the women's movement, whether they were formed through family alliances, friendships or through club attendance were the catalyst for feminist reform.

The most significant characteristic which marked out the separate existence at this juncture of a feminist movement was the translation of those political ties into a close web of social connections. Women found kinship with one another in their moments of relaxation as much as on the campaign trail, and those familiar names which swell the membership list of women's political pressure groups are also prominent within a distinctive social calendar. Political co-operation and good friendship were closely allied.[3]

Anne Digby has suggested that the psychiatric term 'borderlands' could be useful for a discussion of these liminal areas in Victorian society, those places which were neither wholly public nor wholly private where women could work and be seen in society.[4] Digby suggests that because many of the fields of work that women were

entering (education for females and the poor; nursing; medicine; local government administration) were new or developing, they were not yet subject to society's ordering hand and had not yet been deemed 'suitable' or 'unsuitable' for women. As such, women were able to take advantage of these borderland occupations without the degree of fear about censure that they might expect from other public pursuits. She states:

> There were risks for women in establishing frontier posts within this social borderland, and these varied according to the behaviour of the colonists. Those who, in demeanour as well as activity, flouted traditional gender conventions might find themselves designated as occupying not only a social borderland but a psychiatric one also. What both social and psychiatric borderlands had in common, however, was their shadowy, shifting, indeterminate, and ambiguous character.[5]

This chapter will utilise the concept of borderlands to explore these areas of life to which women were beginning to have access. The members of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society were certainly working in this liminal area of society; engaging in these social fields whilst avoiding the idleness of the private sphere and the censure of the public.

Club Life

> The multiplying of women's clubs, and the accompanying facilities for social intercourse, is distinctly a latter-day feature of London society. Twenty years ago they were practically unknown: today they are to be met with on all sides. They are a sign of the times; women have awakened to the fact that they want something outside their domestic and home duties'.[6]

Whilst the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society functioned as a club for its members throughout its duration it was not the only club with which its members were involved. According to Elizabeth Crawford in her discussion of women's clubs in this period, there were two sorts of clubs available to middle and upper-class lady members in the later nineteenth century; those which offered rooms for taking tea, business meetings and taking a break from shopping; and those which offered a socially and politically enlightening atmosphere and conducted a series of debates or discussions. These two

groups were largely split along lines of accommodation; the former often occupying smart addresses which the ladies could use for correspondence and the latter taking place, in the main, in the homes of the groups' leaders or hired accommodation. In the last quarter of the century the most know exponents of this first group would be clubs such as the Alexandra and Empress, and the Ladies' Club Room in Edinburgh. Of the second group those clubs which sprang out of the seed-bed of the Victorian Women's Movement, Langham Place, such as the Pioneer, Kensington and Berners are the most commonly cited.[7] Clubs like these were places where women could mix in a safe environment and discuss the issues that concerned them, as such they have been described by one commentator as 'the collary of women's emancipation'[8] and by another as 'fertile seed beds in which the burgeoning suffrage campaign was nurtured'[9]. Other groups and clubs with which the members of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society were involved were special interest groups that focussed on specific issues whether they be literary, philanthropic or educational.

The Stray Notes section that was introduced in later issues of the magazine advertised the various clubs, groups and meetings with which the ladies could be involved. In Volume 5 of *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* there was an announcement of the first public Ladies' Club to be opened in Edinburgh. The announcement, which is almost a review of its facilities, compares it to London clubs and states that 'It does not aspire to such magnificence as the Russell's club or the Albemarle but in comfort, neatness, and convenience, it holds its own with its more ambitious London sisters'.[10] This suggests that the readers were to expected to have had some contact with London clubs. The Ladies' Club only offers accommodation: the anonymous reviewer states,'This club does not provide dinners for its members, who, being ladies, had better dine at home' and as such belongs to the first type of club outlined above. It also operated a recommendation system for members and an annual fee which provided a gate-keeping function for its proprietors; ensuring that only 'ladies' would be admitted.[11] Later in *The*

Attempt a 'Conversazione at the Ladies' Club' is advertised, suggesting that it did, at a later date, offer some programme of entertainment or instruction. Still later a chess club is proposed and in Volume 5 of *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* there is an editor's note which suggested that the women had close links with the Club; it states:

> The terms of admission are: - Entrance Fee, one guinea; annual subscription, thirty shillings. For further particulars we refer our readers to the Hon. Secretary, School of Cookery, Shandwick Place.[12]

As the Hon. Secretary of the School of Cookery, C.E. Guthrie Wright, an early member of the Ladies' Edinburgh Essay Society, was involved in both organisations, we can assume, as both were in Shandwick Place, Edinburgh, that they shared accommodation. Other clubs and groups that are mentioned in 'Stray Notes' include: The Women's Union Swimming Club; the Kyrle Society; an unnamed 'political club' for women in Edinburgh; the Association for the promotion of food production by women; and the Edinburgh Browning Society which was founded by Bessie Scott Moncrieff, an early member of the Society.

The members were obviously well-acquainted with London societies and clubs and they were discussed in an article in Volume 5 of *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* by Mrs Ramsay Laye who outlined the histories of the Albemarle, Russell, New Berners, Sommerville and the Victoria clubs. This article included practical advice for entry to clubs not just a discussion of their existence. Indeed in a slightly later issue of the magazine there was an addendum to the article which informed readers that the Russell Club was being relaunched as the Lotos Club and 'henceforth it will be specially intended to suit the requirements of those interested in Drama, Music and the Fine Arts generally'.[13]

As a club itself The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society was particularly early for its type. For example, a similar London-based club, the Pioneer which was founded in 1892, met to discuss social and political questions. Its meetings were more regular than its Edinburgh counterpart at once a week but its subjects for debate were remarkably

similar; they included, 'vivisection, the benefits of socialism for women, co-education and Ibsen's plays'.[14] Being based in London the Pioneer had access to more famous speakers at their meetings, including well-known suffragists such as, Millicent Garrett Fawcett. However, whilst The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society debated the suffrage question in 1867 it was not until 1893 that Isabella Ford opened a Pioneer Club debate on 'Why should not women vote'.

Women's clubs enacted, in part, a rejection of the principle of separate spheres. The private and public became blended in the clubs; women could speak publicly in debates, write in published journals and join in the range of social and political activities that were conducted outside the club's auspices but alongside other members. Thus situated between the family and the outside world, the Society offered its members both a place to foster intimate relationships with other women and a position from which to launch their reforming ideas. Moreover, it was those intimate friendships that gave women the confidence and the conviction to enter into public debate about women's position and rights. As Smith-Rosenberg states, 'women, who had little status or power in the larger world of male concerns, possessed status and power in the lives and worlds of other women'.[15] It has been argued that the increase in the number of women's clubs is a direct result of Victorian patriarchal society's attempts to limit women's lives to the private sphere. The separate sphere was physical as well as philosophical; women spent most of their time in different situations and geographical locations than men. Thus it was with women, who they met in domestic situations, that the members of women's clubs were to forge their most significant relationships. As Gwen Athene Tarbox argues:

> It was through these homosocial relationships that many middle-class women cultivated their most intense loyalties, built self-esteem, and became convinced that their concerns deserved a public hearing.[16]

Clubs were also able to help women with the transition between private and public life. As Anne Ruggles Gere has argued for women's groups in America:

> The networks of intimacy they created through their literacy practices helped clubwomen deal with - and change - the disjunctures between societal expectations and their own desires for education, new roles, and entry into other areas of public life.[17]

Clubs enacted what Kathryn Kish Sklar has described as 'women's public culture', forming an alternative public life, initially based on cultural pursuits, whose status as liminal areas enabled women to indulge in them without censure, and later widening their sphere of influence into public life.[18] 'Women's public culture' is based on male representations of women as domestic and religious but erodes them from within. The importance of culture in women's clubs can not be overemphasised; in engaging in cultural definition the women necessarily connected with public life. Thus the women's deciding on debate topics and carrying them out; their reading and suggestions for reading; and their writing of poetry, fiction and prose; their production of plays and shows, sees them actively participating in the definition of culture. Moreover it sees them redefining culture as is particular to their own female experience. Thus books are recommended because they shed light on women's situation or are written by women themselves; plays are produced for asylum inmates because the women feel that they would benefit from cultural pursuits; and they write on subjects that they think would be either entertaining or edifying for their female readers. Gere has argued that the term culture is central to understanding the motivation behind women's clubs:

> Faced with the need to choose a single word to describe the terms in which a majority of women's clubs described themselves, one could do much worse than *culture*. This term encompassed the wide variety of self-improvement projects by which clubwomen justified themselves and sought to transform their status.[19]

Clubs were attended for more practical reasons too. With so many women either working or actively seeking occupation, and many more with tenuous or unsatisfactory home lives, clubs could fill the gap that marriage or occupation may have left. David Rubinstein has argued that the reasons for the abundance of clubs that flourished around the 1890s were threefold:

> The increase in the number of wealthy women with money of their own, the women's emancipation movement and the employment of middle-class women who lacked home life or companionship.[20]

And he also suggests that for many women the main enticement was an assuagement of loneliness; one woman wrote in *The Englishwomen's Review*:

> What life can be more pitiably lonely than that of the cultured, unmarried woman earning her daily bread in London, living perhaps alone in dingy lodgings. Picture one of them returning day after day, year in, year out, to the same atmosphere of dreary ugliness, partaking of her badly-cooked slovenly-served, solitary meal, which she hurries through to rid her sight of the hideous table appointments.[21]

Women's clubs filled the gap left by conventional societal groupings. In 1862 Frances Power Cobbe suggested that the imbalance in population statistics was forcing a change in societal groupings:

> It appears that there is a natural excess of 4 or 5% of females over males in our population... There is, however, an actual ratio of 30% of women now in England who will never marry ... This proportion further appears to be constantly on the increase. It is obvious enough that these facts call for a revision of many of our social arrangements.[22]

Yet communities of women aroused suspicion and scorn in some quarters of Victorian society. A community of women, however short-lived or short-term, was threatening to the doctrine of separate spheres imposed by patriarchy. As Nina Auerbach argues in her feminist 1978 work *Communities of Women - An Idea in Fiction*, there was a marked reluctance to allow women to congregate in non-male areas. This led to damaging reports on the conventual system and formed the backbone of the argument against female education. Auerbach quotes an article in the *Imperial Review*:

> We need not shrink from saying that the congregating of young girls of a certain age, either in boarding schools, true Colleges, or any other gregarious establishment.... Is a downright forcing of minds which might, for the moment, to be kept as dormant as possible. By minds we do not mean intellects; we mean what everybody who is acquainted with human nature will understand. It is on this account, and on this alone, that female boarding-schools are so unspeakably pernicious.[23]

To this she adds, 'By 'minds', the author clearly means "bodies".[24]

One way for women to enjoy the intimacy of being part of a group, yet avoiding its censure was to join like-minded people in a national association. Many of the ladies who were members of the Ladies' Edinburgh Essay Society also became members of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science (NAPSS). Indeed at least 27 of them attended NAPSS's meetings in Edinburgh in 1863 and 1880 many attending both events, which indicates a continued interest in the Association's activities.[25]

The impact of belonging to a club for Victorian women is interestingly expressed by those who were only infrequent participators in such a venture. In Volume 5 of *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* a poem was printed that had been written by members of the St. George Hall Classes, which had been instigated by The Ladies' Edinburgh Literary Society. Through this poem we can achieve a sense of the encouragement that was provided by involvement in club or society life. It is worth quoting the poem in full:

Our Tea Party

On a chill and dreary evening
In the early days of spring-time
There was gathered in our class-room,
Near the western end of George Street,
Many a fair and blooming damsel -
When the treasurer, ascending,
Stood erect upon the platform;
Called the students all to listen
While she read aloud a notice -
Read aloud an invitation
From 'some members of the council'
To a friendly, social meeting.

Soon arrived the day appointed,
And we trooped along the highways -
Trooped along by tens and dozens
To our common destination.
Up the stairs we mounted gaily,
Reached a room where genial faces
Waited ready to receive us -
Reached a room with cups and saucers,
Water-cresses, cakes and coffee,
Ranged in hospitable plenty.

Seated there, we laughed and chatted,
Listened to some words of wisdom,
Gloried gladly in the triumph

Of our clever London sisters.
Then we wandered through the building,
Through the lobby and the club-room;
Read the Magazine, a volume
Of the Ladies' own formation;
Peeped into the heavy columns
Of the Times and other papers;
Asked our friends for light respecting
Both certificates and classes,
Studies and examinations.
Then we talked of higher subjects -
Of the work a cultured woman
Finds to do, whate'er her sphere be;
Of the help to man she renders;
Of her right to education
For her own sake - as a being
Who will live throughout the ages.

Slowly then we all departed,
Grateful for the kindness shown us,
Glad to think our friends were doing
Such a work so well and truly, -
Striving not to make 'blue stockings,'
But a race of thoughtful women
Cultured mind and soul and body.[26]

This poem outlines many of the attractions of club life. The author, who herself was receiving a semi-formal education, sees an afternoon in club life as adding to that education. Whilst the 'geniality' and 'hospitality' of the meeting is emphasised, the author seems more interested in the 'wisdom' afforded by the group. She cites both the magazine that the Ladies wrote (which she herself is writing for) and the availability of other reading material, most notably *The Times*. The 'higher subjects' that they talk on are a woman's education and her role in the realm of culture. Whilst the role of help-meet is still apparent in the line 'Of the help to man she renders' it is couched in the context of her right to education. The writer also feels it necessary to defend the women she meets at the club, she states that they are not 'blue stockings', a common derogatory epithet, but instead are 'thoughtful' and 'cultured'. The poem also makes reference to 'clever London sisters' suggesting that the Edinburgh Society was a direct link to feminist activity south of the Border and that their work formed a continuum with the feminists of Langham

Place or the educators at Girton. This poem, unpolished though it may be, shows the intimate quality of club life and the benefits that it could convey on its members.

Writing Activities

Publishing books opened up new avenues in society for these women. Obviously only those worked published under the writer's own name have been identified and this entry into society might be overplayed for the more timid writers who used pseudonyms. However, publishing books under one's own name marked a definite entry into public life and it was a step that a sizeable proportion of the members of the Society were willing to make. Schooled in print from the inception of the Society and its attendant publishing of a magazine; the members of the Society were well placed to identify the needs of their reading public. Publishing books not only marked an entry into public life, and its associated kudos and possibility of repudiation, but it also carried some chance of monetary gain. The professionalisation of these women's literary pursuits could also have increased their independence and standing in society. However, all of these statements are simply conjectures; there are no personal reminiscences of the women concerning their publishing output and any assumption about their motives and gains from writing books are just that, assumptions. Certainly though, it can be surmised that the move from publishing articles in a 'ladies' magazine' to writing books for a national publisher was a move from private to public and one which a large percentage of the members of the Society were willing to enact.

That the members of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society would write their own books is no surprise. Schooled in writing and publishing in the comfort of the drawing room it seems as though national publication was the obvious next step. Whilst it is difficult, if not impossible, to evince the women's names amongst the often pseudonymous writings in the mass of Victorian periodicals it is easier to locate them in

library catalogues as authors of complete books. To this end the list of members of the Society found in *Ladies in Debate* was compared with the National Library of Scotland's database.[27] The NLS was chosen as it was the copyright library for Scotland at the time and has the further advantage of holding the former Advocates Library of which many of the women were likely to be members. In the list the members' names are written in the following format: for married women, Mrs, husband's first name, married surname; for unmarried women the first sister is denoted by her title and surname the second and subsequent sister, Miss, first name, and then her surname. This way of listing members has certain shortcomings for the purpose of checking against library catalogues; only those women who were second or subsequent sisters or had unusual and easily found surnames can be identified. It is also difficult to equate any published work with writings in the magazine as articles in the magazine were commonly written under a pseudonym. The results of this survey can be found in appendix 5.

The books published come under seven or so main topics, those being: religion; history; novels and poetry; travel writing; education; memoirs; and translations. Although many of the works that the women published were pious in tone, some are actual works of theology. Mrs Brewster MacPherson wrote two such works: the first, *Gifts for Men* was published under the pseudonym X.H.; six years later her second work of theology *Omnipotence belongs only to the beloved* was published. In this later work MacPherson puts forward a treatise on the nature and naming of God.[28] History too, could take on a religious dimension; in her *Historical Sketches* Amelia Hutchison Stirling's characters from history usually have some religious significance. In a later book she turns her attention to Scottish History. Although she was an examiner in history at St Andrew's University, her historiography is perfunctory and has little mention of women.[29]

Women's writing was more likely to be accepted in the Victorian period if it was fictional and 'ladylike'. Despite the success of writers like Mrs Gaskell and George Eliot there were still barriers applied to women's writing. The fictional work that members of

the Society published is often parochial and small in scope. More often than not they focus on romance stories and rural settings. However, some of these writers were exceptionally prolific and achieved some success in getting their books published and read. The most prolific writer amongst those who wrote fiction is Jeanie Morison; the National Library of Scotland holds eighteen of her fictional works. These novels often have Scottish titles like *Booke of Ballades*, *Doorside Ditties*, and *Mill o' Forres*. This type of writing is often defined in Scotland as belonging to the Kailyard School. The stories of the Kailyard are concerned with nineteenth-century Scottish peasant life and are often considered to be limited in scope and parochial in nature. This kailyard connection is also seen in the work of Maria Bell author of *The Country Minister's Love Story* and *Song of Two Homes*. *Song of Two Homes* carries the sentimental preface: 'these poems and songs are published by the sister of the late Maria Bell, in the hope that they may give pleasure and help to others as they have done to her. The author died very suddenly at daybreak on May 3rd, 1899'.[30] Works which were first published in *The Attempt* and *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* also found their way onto national bookshelves, E. J. Oswald's work *The Dragon of the North,* serialised over many months in *The Attempt,* was published in 1888.[31] Others would write children's fiction, for example, Amelia Hutchison Stirling published an illustrated children's romance in 1899.[32]

Whilst some of the fiction that the women wrote could be described as being backward looking and quietist, the women also published in fields that were more daring for their sex. Travel writing was a popular way of getting into print, both in the magazines and in book form. E.J. Oswald acknowledges in the preface to her memoirs of travelling in Norway that the work first saw publication in periodical form in *Good Words*.[33] Anne Dundas' travels are even more adventurous; her book relates her experience in Africa. She includes a chapter on the role of women in Africa concluding that although the society as a whole in more primitive than the west, their treatment of women is more advanced.[34]

The women's interest in education is, of course, reflected in their publishing interests. Well before the Society was formed some of its members were involved in learning and teaching; Louisa Hopes' work on women teachers was published as early as 1853. This work reflects a very traditional view of women teaching: it is pious in tone and follows an epistolary style addressed to 'My dear young friends'.[35] As women's involvement in education was to increase over the next few decades the members of the Society were at the forefront of its development in Edinburgh. Typical of a class of pamphlets, essays and books is Anne Dundas' book, *The St. George's Hall Classes and System of Instruction by Correspondence*, which gives a positive account of the teaching on offer both by attending the classes and taking them by correspondence.[36] Other writers like Louisa Innes Lumsden, who was integral to women's education in the latter half of the nineteenth century, might have been expected to write books on the subject. Her works, *On the Higher Education of women in Great Britain* and *The position of woman: actual and ideal* give much insight into the campaign for female higher education and it administration once it was in place.[37]

Reflecting on the gains women had made in education towards the end of the century some of the members published scholarly translations of classic works. Jane Menzies, daughter of the well-known Edinburgh bookseller John Menzies, translated Cynewulf's *Elene* and Amelia Hutchison Stirling translated Benedictus de Spinoza from the Latin.[38] Still more of the members of the Society wrote memoirs, of themselves, their families and their friends. These memoirs hint at the variety of the interconnections that the members of the Society were part of across Edinburgh and Scottish society. They range from Eve Blantrye Simpson's biography of her father Sir James Simpson, the discoverer of chloroform, to Grace Chalmers Woods' biography of her grandfather Dr Chalmers the political economist.[39] Eve Simpson also wrote extensively on her family's friend, Robert Louis Stevenson.[40] Upper-class Edinburgh life is reflected in works such as E.M. Sellar's name-dropping *Recollections and Impressions* and the other side of that

society is depicted in M.C. Lees' memoir of Nellie Drysdale, a woman who performed charity work amongst Edinburgh's poor and who died herself in penury. [41]

The above mentioned members of the Society who had their work published could be described a part-time writers; other members had longer, more distinguished careers. Of these the Masson sisters were particularly renowned in Victorian Edinburgh. Rosaline and Flora, as daughters of David Masson, professor of English at the University of Edinburgh and editor of *Macmillan's Magazine*, would have had access to all sections of literary Edinburgh, and together their publishing output numbers over 32 individual published works. Rosaline published works on English composition and grammar; Edinburgh; Robert Louis Stevenson; Scottish history; novels and political works. Flora had a more literary bent and published works on the Brontës; Charles Lamb; Tennyson and Shakespeare as well as on the darling of the early women's movement, Florence Nightingale. Lettice Milne Rae, author of the book on the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society, *Ladies in Debate*, also had an established reputation as a novelist; the National Library of Scotland has seven of her books; she was evidently following a family tradition as her mother, who published under the name Mrs Milne Rae and was also a member of the Society, brought out eight novels.

There is no ancillary evidence that these writers and novelists had much impact on the national literary scene. The only member of the Society whose name still has resonance today is Charlotte Carmichael Stopes, and this is probably in part due to the fame of her daughter, Marie Stopes. Charlotte Carmichael was a regular contributor to *The Attempt* and *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* under the pseudonym Lutea Reseda. When she married and moved to London she became the Shakespeare specialist on *The Athenaeum,* writing a regular column for the weekly, she even introduced her daughter to the periodical and she was given regular scientific reviews.[42] Charlotte Stopes reviewed anonymously more than thirty books on Shakespeare for *The Athenaeum* and several articles in her own name. Marysa Demoor in her work on the female writers in the

periodical also surmises that Stopes wrote several anonymous pieces that had a feminist slant for the gossip column of the Athenaeum.[43] Her work on Shakespeare was not only aired in periodicals; she also published fourteen books on Shakespeare and his milieu. The rest of her publishing output reflected her long-held feminist views. In 1894 she published *British Freewomen: their Historical Privilege*, which brought her to the notice of the ruling ranks of the late nineteenth century women's movement.[44] Later she wrote *The Sphere of 'Man' in relation to that of 'Woman' in the Constitution*, and her essays in the *Fortnightly Review* were published as *The Constitutional Basis of Women's Suffrage*.[45]

Accepting that any study of the members of the Society's publishing output must be limited by the research difficulties of incomplete names and the prevalence of pseudonymous writing in this period, it is clear to see that a percentage of the members were keen to exhibit their opinions and imaginations in a public manner through publication. Certainly publishing is one of those liminal areas where Victorian women could indulge themselves in a public sphere with little risk of censure. They could be protected by anonymity or by pseudonymity. However, as has been shown, many of these women chose to publish under their own names with its attendant risk of denunciation. As many of the published writers would have first found an outlet for their writing in the magazines of the Society a direct link can be made between the amateur work within the group and professionally and nationally produced work. A progression is seen from that youthful (and pseudonymous) work to later acclaimed writing.

Changes in Religious observance

Despite the prevalence of dissenting voices apparent in Britain of this time the country remained, in the main, Christian. Church attendance was still the norm for the middle and upper classes; and Christianity remained at the heart of social mores.[46] The

figuring of religious belief put women at the forefront of its ministration. Women were, as discussed elsewhere in this thesis, guardians of the household and of its morals. When women crossed over the threshold into the public sphere in this period it was often with some sort of moral (and therefore Christian) authority. The home, as the last bastion of moral rectitude, and women's place at the centre of the home made this moral guardianship a double bind of responsibility and containment. In his important work on the figuring of social conventions at this time, *The Victorian Frame of Mind* Walter E. Houghton suggests that Christian women were given the role of guardians against the flood of immorality created by the new wealth of the industrial revolution:

> Whether a sacred temple or a secular temple, the home as a storehouse of moral and spiritual values was as much an answer to commercialism as to declining religion. Indeed, it might be said that mainly on the shoulders of its priestess, the wife and mother, fell the burden of stemming the amoral and irreligious drift of modern industrial society.[47]

When women began to move beyond the home into the world of work, both paid and charitable this responsibility as moral and religious guardian was continued into the work place. Indeed for many commentators and the women themselves religion was the impetus for such a move from private to public sphere:

> Victorian society assumed that religion would be the inspiration for women's work; religious belief kept the high idealism of charity strong, sanctifying both giver and receiver.[48]

The connection between church and community or work life was seen to be strong. An involvement with the church allowed women to gain positions of relative authority through missionary work, being members of church vestries, and through Christian philanthropic work. Some commentators have argued that philanthropic work was the simplest way for women to move into the public sphere:

> To women expected to confine their activities to domesticity, the easiest way to a life outside of the parlour lay not in overt rebellion, but in the virtuous path of charity work.[49]

For many women their first taste of committees would be church based. The church was one of the 'borderlands' for Victorian women; liminal areas between the private and

public sphere where their talents could be employed. The community of church work allowed women to work in organised groups and committees places that were denied them in fully public life. Whilst this work was often limited to the efforts of single and widowed women, it did, as Martha Vicinus states allow some outlet for women to realise their capabilities:

> Amid the rhetoric of Christian obedience and duty, a narrow path of self-fulfilment was created for devout single women.[50]

As one would expect from a group of middle and upper class (largely) single women of the Victorian period, the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society were much concerned with the role of religion in their milieu. Matters of a religious nature are discussed both in the pages of their magazine and in their debates. Religious toleration and the following of particular denominations seem to have been of particular interest. The majority of the women would have been regular attendees at a Presbyterian Church, most likely the Church of Scotland. It is the Church of Scotland that is mentioned most often in their articles in both *The Attempt* and *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine*. There are indications that the women thought of their faith in contradistinction to Catholicism, as indicated in articles such as 'The Conventual System' in Volume 6 of *The Attempt*, which adopts a pro-Presbyterian, anti-Catholic stance.[51] However, other Christian denominations are discussed; there is an article entitled 'A Sketch of the Quakers by a Quaker' in Volume 5 of *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine*.[52] There are also several articles on women's involvement in missionary work. Furthermore, a number of the women members of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society were also members of Christian groups and organisations of the time, putting to use their skills as organisers and committee members. As discussed above, some published books on religious subjects.

Perhaps one of the most dominant tropes of women in the Victorian period is of the Angel in the House. This term, derived from Coventry Patmore's long sequence of poems by the same name, is shorthand for the social and religious position of women in

Victorian society.[53] Although some have argued that Patmore's poems reflect more on the position of masculinity than femininity in this period, it is the enduring myth that the term has created that interests us here.[54] The Angel in the House has become allied to the cult of domesticity which was prevalent in the Victorian period. That it functioned as a social more which women had to live by is almost a given, although we can only assume the extent to which it pervaded ordinary homes. The central tenets of this myth are that women, whilst being confined to the home and a domestic role, were powerful in that milieu because of their recourse to moral guardianship and the devout allegiance to Christian duty. Thus, at least in the domestic scene, they exercised influence and were an organising force. Similarly in those borderland areas where women had access, the hospitals, prisons and philanthropic institutions, they too wielded authority solely because of their relationship to God.

There are few sustained analyses of women and religious life in the Victorian period, and almost none that deal with the Scottish context. Whilst role of women in presbyterianism and the work of those involved with the temperance movement has been detailed, the religious life of the majority of Victorian women is, as yet, obscure.[55] As Callum G. Brown and Jayne D. Stephenson have noted:

> A very small number of studies have 'turned up the corners' of the blanket of ignorance: studies of women preachers and of women's role in philanthropy, studies of leading religious figures, and the role of women in the English temperance movement. Beyond these boundaries, the historiography is extremely thin - and especially so in Scotland.[56]

The overriding religious tradition in Scotland in the Victorian period was Presbyterianism. A religion whose foremost exponent was John Knox, a man who railed against the 'monstrous regiment of women', it has often been seen as a faith that was particularly domineering towards women. Though lately historians have begun to argue that the Kirk Session was not so necessarily barbarous towards women it had, especially for working class women, the fear of God on its side.[57] More pertinently for the women examined in this study the Kirk dominated all elements of philanthropic life. Church of

Scotland ministers were influential on all School Boards and Parochial councils well into the twentieth century. Against the backdrop of the Angel in the House myth and the dominance of the Church of Scotland the women of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society could not help but be involved with religion. Religion informs much of their writing and their debates and many of the women were engaged with church business alongside their membership of the Society. Although the inconsistency of the information available on these women's religious involvement makes it difficult to arrive at any holistic view of their religious practice; it is useful to analyse their religious activities and bring these into the context of their social reform activities.

There was a certain amount of contention between the supporters of the campaign for higher education and those with strong religious beliefs. The ability of women to enter higher education was to some a negation of their moral power and many thought it imperative that any education have a religious basis. The Angel in the House was unlikely to be the Angel in the Lecture theatre. In 1888 a delegate to the Aberdeen conference on Woman's Work introduced the Christian Women's Educational Union's programme to her audience. In her paper she argued that whilst it was a woman's duty to educate herself to her best ability it was 'equally important to lead all girls to carry on their studies in a Christian spirit (...) by regularly using the Bible for practical as well as intellectual purposes if religious doubts were to be avoided'.[58]

The subject of religion is of regular concern in the women's writing in *The Attempt* and *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine*; it informs many of the short stories and poems, and there are several articles relating to different areas of religious belief. Although it is stated in *Ladies in Debate* that religious and political debates were not to be discussed at meetings, presumably to put a halt to any vociferous arguments, the theme is a palpable one in the magazines.

In the first volume of *The Attempt* there appeared an article entitled 'On Sunday Reading' by *des Eaux*, the pseudonym of the Society's founder Sarah Siddons Mair. In

this article Mair outlines what she sees to be a hypocrisy in the Scottish church; namely, the championing of devotional reading on Sundays at the expense of any actual religious thought. She suggests that to read dry books and printed sermons on a Sunday which simply make people drowsy is not a correct use of the Sabbath and indeed is contrary to perceived ideas of 'keeping the Sabbath':

> Now, why do we not read books that interest us? Why not books that are suited to our taste and capacities, and over which we have no inclination to become drowsy? 'Oh', some one will say, 'because Sunday ought to be a day of humiliation, we ought not to please ourselves on such a day.' But what possible good are we doing to ourselves or our neighbours by pouring over books for which we have no sympathy? Our imaginary answerer may reply. 'It is our fault that such books do not interest us. We must subdue our hearts and train our tastes to them – they are excellent books for Sunday reading; ' but we may trust their upholders not to read a line of them on a week-day, when they feel at liberty to read anything else.[59]

Mair goes on to suggest that certain types of poetry (she mentions Milton and Tennyson) and some volumes of essays would elevate the mind as much as dry religious works. The Sabbath was still strictly kept in Victorian Scotland, in more northerly parts of Scotland it was extremely strict. The views that Mair expresses may be tame by today's standards but were controversial in her time. Indeed, so controversial that the very next issue M.L. wrote a reaction piece entitled 'The Gift of the Sabbath'.[60] In it she wrote:

> Yet, if we mistake not, we differ in one thing. Des Eaux would lead us to the perusal of whatever will not rudely disturb the peace and repose of the day. She does so, doubtless, because she believes that all such work must lead us to the love and knowledge of God. We cannot see that they do so, without exception, or, indeed, without many exceptions. (...) And, therefore, though intellectual culture be an indispensable accompaniment of a well-spent Sabbath, we would not look on it as a principal object.

Sarah Mair again expresses her liberal views of religion in 'Thoughts on Pastors' in Volume 3 of *The Attempt*.[61] In this piece she articulates her desire of a more plural church and her distaste of those who are conservative in their church attendance. Her view that religion should be more ecumenical, though still Protestant, is a courageous inclusion in the magazine. In it she writes:

> In sermons as in books distinct taste must show itself; and, if in one church or sect we cannot hear what we feel to be for our good, are we to blame if we seek for it in another? (...) Most persons, at least in theory, now admit our right to draw what we will from all sources be they High, Low or Broad Church, Established, Free or Independent.[62]

Another member of the Society writes that the Protestant church is more suitable to plurality than the Catholic Church in an essay entitled, 'Is there or is there not a limit to religious toleration?'.[63] She concludes that she could tolerate almost all churches, as long as they are Protestant. The same writer published a paper in defence of the Bible in Volume 10 of *The Attempt*.[64] Support of the Protestant Church was not limited to articles in the magazines; in Volume 4 of *The Attempt* Alma writes a report on the church congress that she attended in Dublin, suggesting improvements for the synod of the Church of Scotland.[65]

Although evidently the women were largely Protestant there are several mentions of other Christian churches in the magazines; both Quakerism and Catholicism are discussed. In 'A Sketch of the Quakers by a Quaker' the author allies Quaker beliefs with the women's rights movement. She argues that women have always been central to Quaker meetings and therefore can be seen as a prototype for allowing women into public life. She writes:

> Now that so much is being done to open up new fields for the energies of women, and that there is so much controversy on the subject, it is doubly interesting to watch the result of an experiment of this sort which has been tried for so long a time.[66]

Women's involvement in Quaker meetings could, she argues, be beneficial to other areas of their life. Their training as ministers obviously made them excellent speakers on any subject, but it is their 'meetings for discipline' to which she draws attention. These meetings trained women in business making them 'a most desirable accession to any committee'.[67] She also argues that her education as a Quaker was more comprehensive than that afforded to other Christians:

> Until quite recently the education of young Quakeresses was of a much more solid and useful nature than that given to women generally; not being allowed to

> learn music, dancing or other accomplishments which were considered 'worldly' they had more time than the average Englishwomen for solid studies.[68]

However, the writer is at pains to show that Quaker beliefs do not jar with Victorian morals. She writes that the female preachers were often 'the most shy and shrinking of their sex'; that amongst Quakeresses there is no 'neglect of home duties'; and, that although women were freely able to speak on the same basis as men at their meetings 'as a matter of fact most of the talking is done by the man'. Thus although Quaker belief is shown to be more liberating to women the writer feels that there is something inherent in the women's nature that puts them in a different sphere within the faith. For the readers of the magazine the sect is presented as being progressive but not transgressive.

Another aspect of women's Christian life is examined in an article by O.M on 'The Conventual System'. In this piece the writer is soundly against the entering of convents by women. She argues that women can indulge in self-sacrifice and religious observance without hiding away from the world; indeed, to do so is negative in effect as women lose their ability, in entering convents, to exert their moral influence. It is also surmised that by living amongst the ignorant of the outside world women entering convents would be rendered ignorant themselves:

> The effect of a convent life upon the mind would be, I should think, extremely narrowing. Whether you are clever or stupid, it is well for you frequently to meet with your superiors in mental faculties. And a cultivated, thoughtful woman would certainly not be likely to meet with hers among a number of persons of her own sex who lived shut out from the world, ignorant of literature…[69]

It is interesting that this writer does not seem to see any benefit to the women in convents living in an all-female environment. Although many of the women writing for *The Attempt* and *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* advocated the furthering of women's position in society, they did not see separatism as any kind of answer. For writers like O.M. women could only advance their position in society by a full engagement with it; later in the piece she writes:

> Any one who read an article in *Good Words* for 1868, setting forth how a young and delicate girl left her home, in order to learn nursing, and lived and died

> among hospitals and work-houses, tending the poor and needy, and earning for herself, by her faithfulness unto death, a crown of life, must have seen that there are other ways of consecrating body and soul for those whom the duties of mother or sister, daughter or wife, have not been given.[70]

As these excerpts from the ladies' magazines show they were at pains to express the strength of their religious devotion but they were averse to the idea that religious dogma should be followed blindly. These pieces, although they could have been written by the mythical 'Angel in the House', encourage small changes in religious observance. The women advocate alterations in the way that their religion is conducted without suggesting any overhaul of the system. Thus ideas such as a more pluralistic, ecumenical church, less dogmatic reading on the Sabbath, the benefits of Quakerism, and the dangers of the isolation of convent life are voiced in the magazines.

In her work on socially active Christian women Lavinia Byrne argues that Christian doctrine played a large part in the early women's movement, and that this has been largely ignored by historians of the period.[71] Paralleling O.M.'s argument, Byrne suggests that Christian women were keen to work 'corporately' and often ecumenically to bring about social change. Indeed she points out that the various churches were actively in support of the suffrage movement and such groups as: The Catholic Women's Suffrage Society; the Church League for Women's Suffrage; the Free Church League for Women Suffrage; the Friend's League for Women's Suffrage; and the Scottish Churches' Leagues for Women's Suffrage worked together to enfranchise women.[72]

Certainly one of the ways that women entered an activist life was through the church. One of the early members of The Ladies' Edinburgh Essay Society, Helen C. Reid, had her first experience of public life as secretary of the Church of Scotland Women's Association. Reid was co-editor of *The Attempt* and went on to edit *News of Female Missions*, which was distributed with the Church of Scotland newspaper, *Life and Work*. Both activities fed into one another, and the skills that she learned in one group could be used in the other. She was also able to call on her community of friends to help

her in her Christian work and her correspondence under the auspices of the Church of Scotland Women's Association includes letters to other members of the Essay Society; namely, Phoebe Blyth to whom she was in regular contact.[73] Blyth mentions the role of missionary work in her introduction to a series of article on women's work in *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine*. She suggests that to be a missionary is the most apposite conception of women's work. Blyth argues:

> While many other avenues for employment are open to women, none is so lofty an exercise of whatever her powers might be, at home or abroad, in the privacy of her home circle or in the wider sphere of public work, as that by which she seeks to win new subjects to the kingdom of God, or to lead others on to more loyal allegiance to the Prince of Peace.[74]

For Blyth women's ministry could broach the divide between public and private by relation to the divine. Other members of the Society were actively engaged in Church life and ministry. Mary Warrack, for example, became a missionary in Calcutta. The events section in *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine*, Stray Notes, excitedly heralded the first women to be appointed to the vestry in an Episcopalian Church in Scotland. Thus it is evident that for the members of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society religion inflected much of what they wrote and thought. However, as is true for so many other areas of their lives, it was not a dogmatic allegiance to earlier beliefs that characterised their religious observance but a thoughtful and judicious approach. Certainly there is evident here a willingness to view religion critically and to assess its impact on gender.

Women's Employment

> The simultaneousness of the demand for industrial freedom and for higher education is based on a necessity. The education which most women need is one which will fit them for business in professions or in industries.[75]

This statement by Josephine Butler encapsulates the beliefs of members of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society regarding education; whilst they were on the whole

interested in education, both for themselves and for others, they could not fail to be interested in one of education's end results, employment. Although access to employment could be difficult in the mid and late nineteenth century for women, it was not impossible and the subject was one of much debate. As Ellen Jordan has stated, by the beginning of the twentieth century the situation had 'changed beyond recognition' and 'instead of being faced with the most obviously restricted and crowded labour market in the country, (as their nineteenth century sister had been) young middle-class women had a range of occupations they might enter'.[76] Along with the contemporary studies of Alice Clark and Ivy Pinchbeck and the more recent work of Lee Holcombe, Ellen Jordan's work on women's involvement in the world of work in the Victorian period is the most wide-ranging and useful study.[77] Jordan reports that although the number of professions that were open to women had actually been in decline since the beginning of the eighteenth century, largely due to the doctrine of separate spheres, the period between 1851 and 1911 saw a reversal of this development and women were gradually able to enter a growing range of occupations.[78] The most pressing development for women of the middle-classes was to make work an acceptable activity for women. This was recognised by the leaders of the women's movement; in 1859 Bessie Rayner Parkes, addressed a Social Science Congress on the problems facing 'educated women':

> Everybody here present will at once admit that the theory of civilised life in this and all other countries, not excluding the democratic States of America, is that women of the upper and middle classes are supported by their male relatives: daughters by their fathers, wives by their husbands. If a lady has to work for her livelihood, it is universally considered to be a misfortune, an exception to the ordinary rule. All good fathers wish to provide for their daughters; all good husbands think it their bounded duty to keep their wives. All our laws are framed strictly in accordance with this hypothesis; and all our social customs adhere to it more strictly still. We make no room in our social framework for any other idea, and in no moral or practical sphere do the exceptions more lamentably and thoroughly prove the rule. Women of the lower class may work, *must* work, in the house if not out of it - too often out of it! But among us, it judged best to carefully train the woman as the moraliser, the refiner, the spiritual element.[79]

However, as the Ladies writing in *The Attempt* and *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* found, the problem of finding work was not limited to the women of the working classes.

Training for a profession was rare amongst the middle-classes and it was only well into the nineteenth century that any definable movement to overturn that situation was evident. Often the only work open to such middle-class women was the passing on of what scraps of education that had been given them. The multiplicity of governesses evident in mid-Victorian literature testify that this route out of poverty was often the only one for middle-class, unmarried girls. The heroines of *Jane Eyre* and *Agnes Grey* are emblematic of such a class of girls, although few achieved their final happiness:

> The governess in the nineteenth century personified a life of intense misery. She was also that most unfortunate individual; the single, middle-class woman who had to earn her own living. Although being a governess might be a degradation, employing one was a sign of culture and means... The psychological situation of the governess made her position unenviable. Her presence creating practical difficulties within the Victorian home because she was neither a servant nor a member of the family. She was from the social level of the family, but the fact that she was paid a salary put her at the economic level of the servants.[80]

Although these avenues of work were being opened to women in the later nineteenth century it was still difficult for women to have any kind of authority in the public sphere; if she did then it was limited to those realms deemed 'suitable' for women's activity: most obviously, philanthropy literature and art, and to a certain extent, the fields of nursing, teaching and clerking. Those that did so were still likely to be called 'bluestockings', a term that had been in use since the mid-eighteenth century or, more commonly in this period, 'strong-minded women', an epithet which was not intended to be complimentary. In effect these public women had broken the prevailing masculine/feminine opposition of the period and as such had to be reproved. The borderland definition of the areas in which these women were circulating is particularly useful as it dispenses with the difficult juxtapositions in the women's arguments. If they were living and working in this borderland area it is perfectly justifiable that they could agree with much of the Angel in the House definition of women's roles whilst believing that women of intelligence should indulge their gifts in a public and beneficial manner.

In June 1875 *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* began a series of articles entitled 'Woman's Work'. These articles were printed over six months and were intended to give an overview of professions open to women, and of interest to their readers. The series began with an introduction by Phoebe Blyth, well-known in Edinburgh for her work with working women; it was followed consecutively by articles on work in girls' schools; engraving; nursing; medicine; instructor in cookery; and women working for the extension of the parliamentary franchise.

Each of these articles was by a different member of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society and as such we can assume that the editors of the magazine commissioned the series. Furthermore, each writer is an 'expert' in her field having professional ties with the occupation about which she is writing. Blyth's article suggests that there has been a sea-change in the way that women's occupations are viewed.[81] She believes that the change has been brought about by the inability of men to provide for all who are connected to him; a higher estimation of women's capabilities; the effects of the industrial revolution; and the lack of chivalrous feeling amongst men. She also highlights the issue of equality, and for this we must give her credit for her foresight; indeed, at times her writing seems to belong more to a New Woman of a later decade. She writes:

> Experience also has shown that 'capability' in various directions is not a question between men and women, but between individuals of either half of the human race; so that the question now arising in many quarters should not be, What can women do? But, What is it wise or expedient that women should do?[82]

Blyth, like the later feminists that she foreshadows, is beyond the argument of whether women are able to enter occupations but rather is interested in the role of women in the workplace. She is not interested in women's work in philanthropy, literature or art, although she does acknowledge their accomplishments there: rather she wants to address work's 'prosaic side', 'gaining money, some would call it; being independent is its definition by others'.[83] Blyth highlights the utility of the advice to be given in the forthcoming series, not only for women who have the necessity of going into paid

employment but also for those who wish to assuage their idleness. She suggests that even amongst those who belong to the class of women who do not require to work for a living, learning a profession can be of benefit, as preparation for such an eventuality. Indeed, she writes:

> Even when such a necessity never occurs, those who qualify themselves to meet it have a great advantage in the calmness with which they can look forward to coming years, in the higher health they enjoy from having regular and interesting instead of desultory and aimless occupation, and in the firmness and elevation of character they acquire form pursuing a definite aim for a prolonged period of time.[84]

The first article in the series to cover a specific area of women's work was 'Girls' Schools' by Louisa Innes Lumsden. Lumsden was awarded the Lady Literate in Arts (a forerunner of the MA degree for ladies) from St. Andrew's University and was the headmistress of St. Leonard's School for Girls in the same town. In her article she acknowledges that there has never been much opposition to women teaching members of their own sex but argues that this work should be widened and professionalised. She advocates that women should be allowed to be teachers in mixed schools in addition to girl-only educational institutions. However, the proper training of women who wish to teach is her main goal and states that, 'the field of teaching is wide enough, even if restricted to girls'.[85] Thereafter she gives practical advice for women hoping to enter the field.

'Girls' Schools' is followed in the series by 'Engraving on Wood' by Mrs B.B. McLaren.[86] McLaren sees engraving as a potential source of employment for women because of its relation to women's already accepted proficiency in art, although she does state that art has only been conceded as being acceptable by 'the popular voice' because it can be performed in the domestic realm and because the 'labour is light'. The training that she suggests is thorough and to be taken in the form of an apprenticeship. She deplores earlier half-hearted attempts at training women:

> Partial training has been the ruin of many attempts to gain new employment for women. It is often spoken of as desirable that they should be able to 'a little'

> work, and the 'little' which is meant to apply to the matter of quantity is easily transferred to that of quality, and this effectually bars the way to success.[87]

She finishes by suggesting that women should attend their work daily if they are to attain the most benefit, both financially and to their health.

The next article in the series is also concerned with the health-giving properties of regular work. The author of 'Nursing' suggests that:

> Though health is an advantage in every part of life, a lady who is 'not very strong' should not at once decide that she is not fitted to nursing. Her delicacy may arise from want of exercise, or want of interest, or unsuitable climate, and the total change to the active life of a nurse might be most beneficial.[88]

The writer of the next article, on 'Medicine, a Profession for Women' does admit that the profession could take its toll on women's health. However, it is with the proviso that 'there is anxiety and vexation in every vocation of life, and hard work too, in the most case where bread has to be earned'.[89] The article was written by one of the small band of newly qualified women doctors and as such has a mark of rare authority for the Magazine. Eliza W. Dunbar M.D. states her opinions not only articulately but authoritatively. She foresees that many women will go into the profession, not least because of the financial remuneration that it could provide. She writes:

> Our sex has too much practical sense to study and toil without prospect of remuneration. And the number of women-doctors will be limited sooner, or later, by the demand they create for themselves.[90]

In 'Instructress in Cookery' C.E. Guthrie Wright actively seeks support for her venture in Edinburgh.[91] Wright, who was instrumental in founding the Edinburgh School of Cookery, writes in her article that women who follow her direction will exert real influence over the social and economic life of their country. She argues that although the instruction of domestic science had been largely neglected, its tutelage could 'be one of the most powerful agencies of the present day in repressing intemperance among the lower classes, and which cannot fail to add to domestic comfort and economy among all classes'. Wright's objectives feature combinations of domesticity and knowledge; thus

home work can be professionalised and put to work in the community. In another article on the same subject she writes:

> It is much to be regretted that women are not generally taught the principles of political economy, for in various of its departments they are actually, though often ignorantly important agents. By their control of domestic expenditure, they affect, in a great degree, the wealth (i.e. surplus money) and prosperity of the nation; because, though not necessarily engaged in remunerative employment, they can, so to speak, make money be saving it; and by well; and therefore economically, managing that department in which they more immediately preside, secure the best return for their outlay.[92]

Thus, according to Wright, women's place in the home could be used to gain power in the community; women did not have to step outside their private sphere in order to have influence. The professionalisation of domestic economy instead of confining women to the home, had, in Wright's view, the effect of bringing the public sphere to the doorstep of the home. However, later in the article she suggests that women's skill at domestic economy could be made to have financial benefits. She argues that women be trained to teach cooking in schools which would have the combined profit of valorising 'women's work' and providing paid work for those that required it. Furthermore she suggests that a school be founded in order to carry out this education:

> If there were a fair prospect of attendance, a local committee might be formed, and arrangements entered into to have a course of lectures on cookery in Edinburgh next winter, the experience of the London committee forming a basis for the arrangements here. The subject is one worthy of mature consideration, - and as Edinburgh prides itself on the advanced character of its educational institutions, it would surely be more consistent with that character to adopt domestic economy voluntarily as a branch of education, than to wait till it is forced upon us, as it will inevitably be, by the growing sense of its practical utility.[93]

This proposal was carried out and the Edinburgh School of Cookery was founded by a committee with Christain Guthrie Wright as Honorary Secretary in 1875.

The last article in the series discusses a profession that, like instructress in cookery, is designed to bring about the betterment of social and economic life in Britain. In 'The Parliamentary Franchise for Women' Flora Masson argues that by working for women's enfranchisement women would extend the scope of public society to include

women.[94] At this early stage of the suffrage movement Masson is only arguing for the franchise to be extended to women householders. Presumably that is why the article has been included in the series on Women's Work, Masson is suggesting that if women were to take up a trade they were more likely to be enfranchised. She adds the qualification that this project will not have implications for married women or women living with relations. She notes:

> It affects only unmarried women and widows who annually pay their rates and taxes in their own names; and the bill, were it passed, would not compel them to vote, but only permit them to do so if they wished.[95]

The practical side of achieving employment for women that is exhibited in these articles is also reflected in short notices on employment in the magazine. In Volume 6 of *The Attempt* Sarah Mair advertises her own Northern United Registry for Governesses, giving her own (and the Society's) address for correspondence. The Northern United Registry for Governesses acted as an employment bureau for women working as governesses or training as governesses. The notice also states that preference is given to those applying with university qualifications which is testament to Mair's belief in the practical benefits of higher education.[96] Another article, which suggests that these women were interested in the professionalisation of work, is 'The Working Ladies' Guild' which testifies to the groups of women who were trying to aid their sisters to gain employment.[97] The author of the piece, H.A. Duff, details the groups working within this field: The Ladies' Dressmaking and Embroidery Association; The Society for the Employment of Women; and the Association for German Governesses. She also suggests The *Woman's Gazette* as a good place for women to gain information on possible work. [98] She states that The Working Ladies' Guild offers mutual support and help, and whilst the principal aim of the Guild is to find suitable employment for its members it also seeks to 'maintain or restore independence to those assisted'. Duff is obviously aware that the Guild is able to help those most in need:

> London is full of forlorn women, who cannot obtain employment through the existing channels; it is for their sake that the Guild is anxious to throw open other doors, and to utilise whatever is offered in the way of aid for those on its books.[99]

Elsewhere the National and Metropolitan Association for providing Trained Nurses for the Sick Poor which was founded by Miss Florence Lees (one of the Nightingale probationers) is mentioned.[100]

Participation in the Suffrage Movement

James D. Young wrote in his work *Women and Popular Struggles* that 'a middle-class Women's Movement (apart from a few scattered individuals) simply did not exist in mid-Victorian Scotland'.[101] Few statements have been further off the mark. Combining core members of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society and similar social groups in Glasgow, Dundee and Aberdeen, the three 'pivotal' households in Edinburgh: the Mairs, the Stevensons and the MacLarens, the women's movement certainly existed and indeed prospered. Those who went on to support the suffrage protest began their campaigning lives working for increased social integration for both women and the working classes. Their agitations spread across every facet of Victorian life: education; entry to the professions; legal rights for women; improved sanitary conditions; street lighting; rational dress; hospital provision and nursing:

> It is not merely in the region of politics that this forward movement is noticeable; it is evident also in the cry for more and better education, for entrance into the professions, for freedom from the trammels of conventionality and fashion.[102]

It was not surprising that these women became involved in the suffrage movement given their interest in other areas of the early women's movement. However, as would be expected, their early forays into the suffrage debate did come with typically middle-class provisos and conditions, Flora Masson wrote in an essay advocating women's gaining of the right to vote in *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine*:

> It is sometimes said that, if the franchise were extended to women, they would become unwomanly, and would neglect their household cares; and we should indeed be sorry if this were the case.[103]

An essay on 'Women and the Parliamentary Franchise' written anonymously in the magazine in 1880 only advocated the conferment of the vote to women who were rate-paying, that is those who were widows and spinsters. The essays on this subject in the Society's magazines tend to be balanced in tone allowing that their readers may have a variety of opinions. This is to be contextualised by the fact that although the Ladies' Edinburgh Essay Society was the first to debate the question of women's suffrage in 1867 it was not until 1884 that it was passed by a majority. This anonymous writer stresses that it is woman's special qualities that should enable her to vote, not her equality with men:

> There are many questions which would distinctly gain by the advocacy of women, and of which their possession of power would tend to hasten the settlement, - social and moral questions which are always pressing for a solution. For instance, what assistance might they not give to the movement for the better regulation of the liquor traffic? They are, it is true, slave as well as men to the drinking customs of this county but then their vested interests in them are not nearly so large. Again, they have always been deeply interested in the cause of education, and have not only the power to vote for the school boards, but also to be elected as members of them; they have been foremost in all private movements, for the provision of better dwellings for the poor and for the diffusion of sanitary knowledge; therefore legislation on these subjects would receive their most earnest attention.[104]

Thus the argument of separate spheres is used by this suffrage campaigner for women's benefit; she argues that women with their innate goodness and talent for social regulation are eminently suitable for political life.

However, later in the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, these women followed the national tendency to become more active in the campaign for women's rights and to argue for equality, extending their struggle for the suffrage to married women. Members of the Society contributed to the movement in both theoretical and practical ways. Charlotte Carmichael Stopes wrote one of the most important treatises on women's rights in the late nineteenth century and published it in 1894. *British Freewomen: their Historical Privilege* argues for women's rights on five main points; ethnological,

philological, legal, historical and biblical, arguing that historical logic suggests women's equality with men. The book had its genesis in an 1885 meeting of the British Association in Aberdeen where Stopes intended to present a paper before the Section of Economics and Statistics on 'The history and statistics of woman's privilege and the economic effects of the abstention of women from voting'. The paper was rejected as being likely to lead to a risky political discussion. However she states in *British Freewomen* that the information that she gathered for the paper was subsequently used ' since in drawing-room addresses, and in private conversation; in public papers, and in friendly correspondence'.[105] She was encouraged to publish by Helen Blackburn then editor of *The Englishwoman's Review*. In her book Stopes systematically confronts the oppositions to women gaining the suffrage. In an attempt to counter the hue and cry with logic, she states:

> No one can deny that it is just to grant women the Suffrage, no one can deny that it would be *advantageous for them* to receive it. There is no reason that a thing should be because it has been, but when the only objection brought against a thing is, that it has not been, it is time to test if that statement be really true. We have not found the received assertions true in regard to this subject. Hence the publication of this little book.[106]

Other members of the Society were willing to counter the prejudice that they felt against themselves in more practical ways. Long before the militant battles fought by the Pankhursts and others in the twentieth century, some women in Scotland took their fight to the courts and generated a widespread interest in their cause. The Representation of the People (Scotland) Act of 1868 entitled the Scottish universities to return two Members of Parliament. In its statutes the franchise was given to 'persons of full age and not subject to legal incapacity' who were members of the General Council of their Scottish university. In 1889 an Act gave Scottish universities the power to allow women to graduate and in 1892 this Act was used for the first time. It was not until 1906 that the first university seat was contested. At this time women graduates applied for voting papers on the basis that they were full members of Edinburgh University's General Council. The following women; Margaret Nairn, Elsie Inglis, Frances Simson, Frances Melville and Chrystal

Macmillan banded together as the 'Committee of Women Graduates of the Scottish Universities' and contested the decision at Edinburgh's Court of Session. Two of the women were members of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society, Frances Simson and Frances Melville, and Elsie Inglis had close personal links with Sarah Siddons Mair. The women argued their case on two technical points, firstly that the universities had no legal right to withhold voting papers to members of the General Council and that the 1868 Act did not exclude women from voting because it stipulated 'persons' not 'men'. Of course, the women failed in their attempt but they did bring considerable publicity to the irregularity.[107]

Members of the Society were active in the organised suffrage movement of the early twentieth century. There is no evidence for any of them joining militant suffrage groups such as the Pankhurst's Women's Social and Political Union and all evidence points to them being involved with non-militant organisations such as the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies.[108] In the published proceeding of the Annual Meeting of the Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage in 1901 it is clear that the members of the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society were active in the movement in Edinburgh. Of twenty-three committee members eleven were members of the Society, and many more are listed as delegates and supporters. Speakers at the meeting included Society members Misses Flora and Louisa Stevenson and Mrs Steel.[109] Sarah Siddons Mair was President of the Scottish Federation of the NUWSS from 1910. A discussion of the Scottish Suffrage Summer School in *Common Cause* in 1914 suggests that members of the Society were at the very heart of the Scottish suffrage campaign:

> Miss S.E.S. Mair, the beloved President of the Scottish Federation and Dr Elsie Inglis, its indefatigable Secretary, are to be with us, whilst Miss Lumsden, L.L.D., the famous Scottish Educational pioneer, is presiding the first week.[110]

Conclusion

Many women who belonged to the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society effected the move into a more public sphere for themselves and their fellow women. Their interest in questions of employment, education and suffrage suggests a similarity with better known assemblies of women who campaigned for women's rights. Most obviously their activities can be compared to the Langham Place Group.[111] Like those who were involved in Langham Place their campaigns were pluralistic, fighting the battle on more than one front. Moreover, their reappraisal of women's traditional sphere, represented here by religion and literature, shows that they were aware of the inherent biological determinism of British society and were keen to challenge that system from within.

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Conclusion

> From all the occupations above named, matrimony, literature, and charity, society, as a profession in its own right, is easily distinguished. Each of these cultivates society so far, as society may advance its own special interests. On them, therefore, society has no pressing claims. It is the profession of the unprofessional, that is, by the fair sex, that its duties have hitherto been discharged. And so cheerfully have ladies accepted their lot, and so gracefully and conscientiously have they performed the tasks allotted to them, that these are now looked upon as woman's sphere *par excellence*; and men, released from social obligations, do not dream of even offering a vote of thanks to their hard-wrought substitutes, who make calls, write letters, and study civilities, to fill up the failing measure of father, husband, or brother.[1]

In 1870 Miss Spalding writing as Sanct Rewle in *The Attempt* suggested that the cultivation of their milieu was woman's greatest duty. This, however, was expanded by the members of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society to include not just 'making calls, writing letters and studying civilities' but the overhaul of the education, social and political aspects of women's lives. Their activities redefined the 'spheres' that commentators such as Sanct Rewle allotted according to gender, and made society as a whole their concern. Indeed they revolutionised the sense of the word society as it applied to them; no longer was it small and domestic but had taken on extra meaning to suggest the public and the political. The members of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society's involvement in, and cultivation of, their society was at the forefront of all their operations, whether educational, social, or political. This thesis has shown these women's success at enriching the society within which they lived. Whether as working women, or, more likely, as annuitants and home-makers, they regarded society as their main interest, if not their profession.

This study began with an assessment of the topos of the woman reader and a discussion of the usefulness of reading theories for an analysis of such a group as The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society. I argued that whilst early studies of reader experience tended to isolate the reader as historical subject, more recent works, particularly by Jonathan Rose, concentrate on audiences rather than individuals; this was

shown to be a much more fruitful way of looking at phenomena such as women's clubs. Moreover, the importance of a gendered audience was asserted and paradigms for looking at women in history assessed. This gendered approach allowed access to the notion of subcultures and introduced the idea of a stratified society where women were believed to be in a different sphere from men. By denoting the members of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society as belonging to a subculture it became possible to show how they navigated their marginal status and how they used culture as a way of negotiating a path out of such a categorisation. At this point the paradigm for understanding this redefinition of the separate spheres discourse was introduced and denoted as being a process of 'Self-Culture'.

This theme of 'Self Culture' was traced through a narrative of the events of the Society and through the biographies of its members. It was shown that certain prominent members did indeed succeed in conflating the Victorian idea of separate spheres. Their personal biographies were presented to indicate the achievements of both the women as individuals and the success of the Society as a whole in preparing its members for public life. The theme of Self Culture was then examined in relation to the women's activities in the magazine they produced and their writing in it; their activities in the promotion and provision of education for women; and, in the main business of the Society, the debates. Furthermore, the voices of the member of the Society were traced through the disparate causes and concerns with which they were involved. Involvement in ladies' clubs was shown to be a central force in the Victorian women's movement and that The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society fulfilled just such a role in Scotland. This involvement in social and political debates can be traced through the member's participation in religious activity, in their campaigns for suitable working situations for women, in their endeavours in writing for publication and, of course, the suffrage campaign. Membership of the Society galvanised campaigning behaviour and it became a catalyst for many of the reforms fronted by women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The

Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society enacted a role for Scotland not unlike that provided for England by the Langham Place Circle. Like 'their London sisters' the member's of the Society began their activities with the publishing of a magazine and like those in Langham Place their subsequent campaigns took them into almost every reform group in Victorian and Edwardian society. However, unlike the women involved in the Langham Place Circle the members of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society have not been feted as pioneering early feminists and many are now lost to the historical record. Uncovering their voices and stories is essential to forming an understanding of the development of feminism in Scotland and the importance of collective action on the early women's movement.

This study of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society therefore contains suggestions for future work in the field of historical cultural studies. Empirical investigations have shown the link between cultural and intellectual activity and social and political integration. The development of a drawing-room society into a foundation for reform is one that has significance for those studying the effects and importance of culture on society. This study will have relevance for those interested in gender studies, particularly women's history and will help to redefine the private/public opposition that many have argued women were subject to in the late nineteenth century. There remains much to be done in the ongoing project of the recovering of women's biographies from the historical record and that this study will add to the amount we know about the early women's movement in Britain and go some way to compensating for the dearth of work on the early women's movement in Scotland. Further work, beyond the scope of this thesis, on the women's movement in Edinburgh may yield more information on the individual biographies of these women and on the causes with which they were involved.

The idea of self-culture offers a paradigm for understanding the Victorian women's movement; expressed in the term Self-Culture. Whilst other studies have concentrated on certain aspects of the movement, such as the suffrage or the campaign for

higher education, this study allows a holistic view of the role of reform in these women's lives. It shows that these women were not single-issue campaigners but were engaged with the overall project of ratifying women's rights. Whilst not all the women followed this private to public pattern, and only the work of a few of the most prominent women can be traced, it is clear from this study that concentration on a single issue can only give a partial view of the Victorian women's movement. Moreover, this study has shown the roots of this movement and the importance of the community aspect of these women's lives on their later campaigning fervour. By studying the woman as a group, without eliding their differences of opinion, it is possible to argue that the society or club was the seedbed for reform activity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The cultural life of the autodidact has been studied extensively for this period, most notably by Richard Altick and, recently, by Jonathan Rose. The term is most often applied to working class men who self-educate, this study has however shown that the term autodidact can be applied to middle-class women in Victorian Britain. Denied access or discouraged from state-sponsored education for most of the nineteenth century these women were either taught at unregulated ladies' schools or by governesses. The majority would have had to engage in some sort of self-education. This lack of any formalised approach to the education of girls and young women left a gap not only in their schooling but also in their social lives. The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society was able to fulfil both these roles and it is this process that I have denoted as self-culture.

This thesis reveals the process of self-culture amongst the women of Edinburgh through their membership of a Ladies' Society. Excluded from parliamentary debate they started their own debating society; barred from higher education they organised their own university classes; neglected in public records they recorded their own minutes; unpublished in the major journals they founded their own magazine. The members of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society may indeed have been ostracised from certain areas of public life but that did not mean that they did not live *public lives*.

References:

[1] Sanct Rewle, 'Society as a Profession', *The Attempt* 6 (1870), 158-163 (p. 159).

Appendix 1 - Subjects of Debate of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society 1867-1934

Where a vote was taken 'A' indicates an affirmative majority and 'N' indicates a negative majority.

1867	
June	Is boarding school education superior to education at home? N
Oct	Are the pleasures of the country greater than the advantages of the town? N
1868	
Jan	Was Charlotte Corday justified in assassinating Marat? N
Feb	Should the education of ragged-school children conform in all cases to the Protestant religion? N
Mar	No debate.
Apr	Were the Southern States of America justified in seceding from the Union? A
May	Has monasticism been on the whole beneficial to the world? A
June	Is the poet of greater use to mankind than the philosopher? A
Nov	Was the execution of Charles 1 justified? N
Dec	Are historical novels advantageous to the study of history? A
1869	
Jan	Is Juliet to be more admired than Miranda? A
Feb	Has hero-worship an elevating influence on the mind? A
Mar	Should education be compulsory?
Apr	Was the prosecution of Warren Hastings justifiable? N
May	Is Thackery superior as a novelist to Dickens? A
June	Are the manners and customs of society life on the continent superior to those at home? N
July	Is it desirable under any circumstances and at any time to publish private correspondence in biographical works? A

Oct	Are the poems of Wordsworth more likely to obtain immortality than those of Browning? A
Nov	Were Lord Bacon's virtues more distinguished than his crimes? A
Dec	Are character and policy of Napoleon III worthy of admiration? A
1870	
Jan	Is the literary glory of Queen Elizabeth's reign greater than Queen Victoria's time? N
Feb	Is it ever lawful to tell a lie? N
Mar	Does human nature improve rather than remain stationary, though forms of civilisation change? A
Apr	Should men's actions be judged by their consequences? N
May	Is it a higher and more useful aim for a novelist to portray life as it should be than as it is? N
June	Would the Greek Government be justified in granting an amnesty to the brigands of Marathon? N
Nov	Are we always conscious even in sleep? A
Dec	Is Sir Walter Scott's estimate of the Convenaters a correct one? A
1871	
Jan	Is France responsible for the present war? A
Feb	Should appeal to the feelings be more convincing than an appeal to reason? N
Mar	Should religious toleration be unlimited? A
Apr	Do the Germans hold a higher position in music than the Italians? A
May	Should education be compulsory? A
June	Is the musician more dependent than the painter on imagination? No decision
Nov	Is Miss Austen the greatest female novelist of the day? N
Dec	No debate.

1872	
Jan	Should the education of an ordinary mind be the cultivation of general intelligence of many subjects rather than proficiency in one? A
Feb	May Sir Walter Scott be placed in the first rank of poets? A
Mar	Should women be admitted to the Parliamentary Franchise? N
Apr	Are all the characters of the men in Shakespeare's plays inferior to his most perfect heroines? A
Oct	Are the actions of men more influenced by imitation than by reason? A
Nov	Is Burns a greater poet than Byron? A
Dec	No debate.
1873	
Jan	Was Claverhouse guilty of unnecessary cruelty to the Covenanters? A
Feb	Is mental philosophy more worthy of study than physical science? A
Mar	Does the social happiness of mankind increase with the increase of civilisation? A
Apr	Is youth the happiest period of life? N
May	Is music a higher art than painting? A
June	Is Tennyson superior as a poet to Browning? A
July	Is genius preferable to application? A
Oct	Is perfect sincerity compatible with perfect politeness? A
Nov	Is the will free? A
Dec	Is George Eliot the greatest novelist of this reign (Victoria's)? N
1874	
Jan	Is the duty of women to pay great attention to dress? A
Feb	Should the Swedish Liquor Law be introduced into Great Britain? No decision.
Mar	Are we to be congratulated on the change of Government? N
Apr	Discussion on name change of magazine.
May	Ought a promise extorted by unlawful means be performed? N

June	Are excursions to the High Alps to be commended? A
July	Was the execution of Charles I justifiable in the circumstances? N
Oct	Is patriotism a virtue? No decision.
Nov	Debate postponed.
Dec	Is character more influenced by physical than moral causes? N
1875	
Jan	Is the advocate justified in defending his client when he knows him to be guilty? A
Feb	Is popularity a test of literary excellence? A
Mar	Is it advantageous to a country to have a religion established by law? N
Apr	Can the immortality of the soul be discovered by the light of Nature? N
May	Is there a standard of taste? A
June	Is the realistic more in accordance with the true principles of Art than the ideal school of painting and sculpture? N
July	Reading of poems by members.
Oct	Can the characters of men be discovered from the features of their faces? A
Nov	Is the existence of an aristocracy advantageous to a country? No decision.
Dec	Debate postponed.
1876	
Jan	Does the study of physical science tend to shake religious belief? N
Feb	Is it better for adults first to prepare for local examinations than at once to proceed to higher branches of study? N
Mar	Has belief in witchcraft, sorcery, apparitions and spiritualism any foundation in truth? A
Apr	Have animals any recognition of moral responsibility? N
May	Is the mind conscious in sleep? A
June	Has scepticism had a worse effect on society than superstition? N

July	Discussion: favourite characters in Shakespeare.
Oct	Are Miss Ferrier's novels better than Mrs Gaskell's? N
Nov	Is German literature equal to English? N
1877	
Jan	Is the theory of Evolution necessarily opposed to Christianity? A
Feb	Would it be beneficial to Europe if the power of Russia were extended over Turkey? N
Mar	Does *Daniel Deronda* sustain the reputation of its author? N
Apr	Is it desirable that our Government should send out another Arctic Expedition? No decision.
May	Is it desirable that our Government should send out another Arctic Expedition? A
June	Is a life of frequent travelling a better means of mental culture than a life spent at home? A
July	Description by each member of a picture which she had seen.
Oct	Is it advisable that women should take part in field sports? N
Nov	Is a thorough English education attainable without a knowledge of Latin? No decision.
Dec	Is the Saxon element in our literature at present more powerful and elevated than the Norman? N
1878	
Jan	Is a thorough English education attainable without a knowledge of Latin? N
Feb	Have the servants of the present day really deteriorated as a class from former times? A
Mar	Do educational prizes and competitions tend to lower the moral character? N
Apr	Is Chaucer a greater poet than Spenser? M
May	Is the Wagner theory of music and the drama correct? N
June	Is home education more advisable for girls than school? N
July	Members described some impressive sight they had seen.

Oct	Does the dress of men and women of the present day show evidence of development in refinement and good taste? No decision.
Nov	Shall we amend our laws of spelling? N
Dec	Is the present neglect of Italian in favour of other languages common in the education of girls to be regretted? No decision.
1879	
Jan	Is the present neglect of Italian in favour of other languages common in the education of girls to be regretted? A
Feb	Is the influence of Browning advantageous to English literature? N
Mar	Is Lady Macbeth really a fiendish queen? A
Apr	Should Art represent only the beautiful? Equal
May	Does Aurora Leigh merit Mr Ruskin's encomium that it is the greatest poem produced in this century? N
June	Is the character of the miser more despicable than that of the spendthrift? N
July	Discussion: 'where shall we go?'
Oct	Papers were read.
Nov	Report of Committee for the Improvement of Rules, and consideration of same.
Dec	Is Gothic architecture superior to Greek, Neo-Greek, or Byzantine? A
1880	
Jan	Has criticism on the whole been beneficial to literary excellence? A
Feb	Is Law sacred? A
Mar	Is the acted drama capable of elevating the masses? A
Apr	Is the study of science hostile to a love of poetry? N
May	Are small societies for self-improvement or pleasure desirable? A
June	Is silliness a moral and curable defect? A
July	Is a late better than an early hour for the principal meal of the day? A
Oct	Discussion re magazine
Nov	Discussion re magazine

Dec	Debate postponed.
1881	
Jan	Is Elizabeth properly ranked as one of the greatest English Sovereigns? No decision.
Feb	Is the humour of Dickens more beneficial in its tendencies than the humour of Scott? N
Mar	Is it advisable that the Kindergarten system should be introduced into our country? A
Apr	Is the French *mariage de convenance* more conducive to the happiness of those concerned than the English system? N
Nov	Is Queen Elizabeth rightly ranked as one of the greatest English sovereigns? A
Dec	Is the severance of Church and State desirable? N
1882	
Jan	Are the reforms proposed for the Scotch Universities desirable? A
Feb	Are paid services better than voluntary? A
Mar	Is Herbert Spencer's system of education good for children? N
Apr	Is music essentially a modern art? A
May	Is it possible that the English-speaking races represent the lost tribes of Israel? N
June	Do you approve of the abolition of seat rents and appropriation of sittings in churches? N
Nov	Does luxury tend to the well-being of Society? A
Dec	No debate.
1883	
Jan	Should public amusements be provided for the masses on Sunday? A
Feb	Is symbolism an integral part in the highest forms of Art? A
Mar	Is it better that the land be in possession of the few than of the many? A
Apr	Is it desirable that marriage with a deceased wife's sister should be legalised? N

May	Does opposition tend to promote the development of national and individual character? A
June	Is the Temperance movement in danger of being carried too far? A
July	Ought the Salvation Army to be tolerated? A
Nov	Is *John Inglesant* likely to have a lasting reputation as a standard work? A
Dec	Is there reason to believe that mind can act upon mind without the medium of the senses? N
1884	
Jan	Is Chaucer's ideal of woman higher than that of Shakespeare? Equal
Feb	Is the enfranchisement of women desirable? A
Mar	Has Froude on the whole righteously fulfilled the office of biographer to Carlyle? Equal
Apr	Is anonymous criticism in the Art desirable? A
May	Are there tenable grounds for believing in pre-Adamite man? A
June	Is the legalising of cremation desirable? A
July	A general discussion on the most powerfully drawn characters in Sir Walter Scott's prose and poetry.
Nov	Arrangement of list of subjects for debate.
Dec	Is the existence of a hereditary body of legislators desirable? A
1885	
Jan	Is the present Poor Law system the most effectual in relieving the poor? N
Feb	Is it likely that Carlyle will have a more lasting on the thought of the country than Coleridge? N
Mar	Is the Poet necessarily the Teacher? Equal
Apr	Were the Crusades a gain to Christendom? A
May	Is the world deteriorating? N
June	Is the increased expenditure on dress by women of the present day desirable? N
Nov	Is vivisection justifiable? A

Dec	Is Milton's 'Lycidas' a finer monady than Tennyson's 'In Memoriam' or Shelley's 'Adonais'? Equal
1886	
Jan	Are the conditions of the nineteenth century adverse to the production of masterpieces equal to those of the past? N
Feb	Is free education desirable? N
Mar	Is the working man of the day better off than the working man of fifty years ago? A
Apr	Does any American novelist equal Thakeray or Dickens? N
May	Is it advisable that a training college for women intending to teach in secondary schools and private families be founded in Edinburgh? A
June	Discussion on heroines.
Nov	Does the English circulating library tend to raise the tone of popular literature? A
Dec	No debate.
1887	
Jan	Are we retarding Evolution by aiding the survival of the unfit? A
Feb	Ought any professions other than the Army and the Navy to be closed against women? N
Mar	Is it possible to realise a successful system of district visiting? No decision.
Apr	Is the education of girls being pushed to an extent dangerous to health? N
May	Are the sonnets of D. G. Rossetti equal to those of Wordsworth? N
Nov	Is Mr Ruskin a sound political economist? N
Dec	Is the purely dramatic novel a higher work of art than the more reflective? N
1888	
Jan	Is it for the benefit of the Highland that Gaelic should continue to exist as a living language? N
Feb	Is a discursive knowledge of many things better than a deep knowledge of one? N

Mar	Is Matthew Arnold's aphorism a sound one – that the inequality of classes tends to cause barbarisms on the upper classes; to vulgarise the middle; and to brutalise the lower? N
Apr	Are great men born, not made? A
May	Can a hopeful inference be drawn from the present conditions of humanity that wars will cease? N
June	General discussion on American poets.
Nov	Is there a danger lest the love of aestheticism may be so indulged as to lead to false estimates of moral worth and to hardening of the heart? A
Dec	No debate.
1889	
Jan	Does *Robert Elsmere* deserve all the attention it has received? A
Feb	Does the growth of good in the world exceed the growth of evil? A
Mar	Does the existence of Browning societies improve the greatness of the master? N
Apr	Do the years bring more than they take away? A
May	Is pain a necessity? A
June	Do modern facilities increase the pleasure of travelling? A
Nov	No debate
Dec	Can a nation have good art without good living? A
1890	
Jan	Are strikes on the whole beneficial to the community at large? A
Feb	Does George MacDonald rank as a great teacher? N
Mar	Are ghost merely subjective? N
Apr	Should secular education precede the preaching of Christianity in our mission work? A
May	Is the highest human love blind? N
June	Discussion on various poems.
Nov	Does much reading tend to destroy originality? N
Dec	Has literary criticism improved within the Victorian era? A

1891	
Jan	Is General Booth's scheme likely on the whole to be beneficial? A
Feb	Is the highest development of women likely to be the product of resident colleges? A
Mar	Is self-interest the mainspring of human action? N
Apr	Are religious communities of women desirable? N
May	Is thought-reading an established fact? N
June	Is there any moral turpitude in dyeing the hair and painting the complexion? A
Nov	Have women creative genius? A
Dec	Should political associations of women make female suffrage a primary object? A
1892	
Jan	Was Laurence Oliphant a failure? A
Feb	Is teetotalism more effective against drunkenness than temperance? N
Mar	Are the Scotch deficient in humour when compared to English and Americans? N
Apr	Are there serious objections to mixed classes in the Universities? N
May	Is flirtation morally wrong? N
June	Is shyness curable? A
Nov	Does a pessimistic view of human life tend to paralyse energy? A
Dec	Is there a British poet suitable to fill the Laureateship? A
1893	
Jan	Is the retention of Alsace-Lorraine by Germany a menace to the peace of Europe? N
Feb	Is Fabian Socialism worthy of support? N
Mar	Is immediate popularity any guarantee of little merit? N
Apr	Is free education tending to weaken the sense of parental responsibility? A

May	Are mistresses chiefly to blame for the unpopularity of domestic service? A
June	Discussion: Is everyone the better for the having of a hobby?
Nov	Has the prophetic faculty died out? A
Dec	Is Rudyard Kipling's popularity deserved? A
1894	
Jan	Is the civilisation of Great Britain likely to be of greater stability and value that that of America? A
Feb	Does Raphael deserve to be called 'The Prince of Painters'? N
Mar	Does Tennyson surpass Wordsworth as an interpreter of Nature and Life? Equal
Apr	Does the so-called revolt of the daughters necessarily imply blame to either mothers or daughters? N
May	Should Members of Parliament be paid? N
June	State your pet aversion in occupation, dress and food. Discussion.
Nov	Is the fame of Robert Burns deserved? A
Dec	Has Art ever been truly the handmaid of religion? A
1895	
Jan	Should the present House of Lords be maintained? A
Feb	Should women with a competence work for money? A
Mar	Is Ibsen's influence on the whole salutary? N
Apr	Should the Bishop of Chester's scheme for the reform of public houses be adopted? A
May	Is the continuance of the English occupation of Egypt justifiable? A
June	Various readings from literature.
Nov	Does the presentation of evil in fiction and the drama tend to raise the moral standard? No decision.
Dec	Should the University of Oxford under present circumstances grant its degrees to women? A

1896	
Jan	Are the prospects of Art in Scotland hopeful? A
Feb	Is the British Empire on the decline? N
Mar	Is poetry likely to be the medium of the most influential thought of the future? A
Apr	Would it have been better for England and Scotland if Edward I had succeeded in uniting them? N
May	Are manners deteriorating? A
June	Discussion on a selection of poems.
Nov	Is scepticism more deteriorating to the mind than superstition? A
Dec	Can Europe unite to dispel the Turks? A
1897	
Jan	Is heredity a greater factor n character than environment? A
Feb	Is Marie Corelli's popularity deserved? N
Mar	Should the teaching of Welsh and Gaelic be encouraged in our schools? A
Apr	Are Byron's works unjustly depreciated at present? A
May	Has any man or woman a right to be idle? Equal
June	Discussion: favourite pieces of prose.
Nov	Has natural science done more for humanity than literature and philosophy? Equal
Dec	Does patriotism tend to narrow the sympathies? N
1898	
Jan	Ought the publication of personal gossip to be encouraged? N
Feb	Is the poetry of Tennyson of more real value than that of Browning? N
Mar	Has compulsory education been beneficial to the nation? A
Apr	Have American authors given us any grand conceptions of the female character? N
May	Is Dr Keith's plea for a simpler life convincing? N

June	Discussion: Humorous extracts from favourite works.
Nov	Is it desirable to check the growth of great cities? A
Dec	Has the Kailyard style of fiction permanent value? N
1899	
Jan	Is arbitration the best method of settling international difficulties? Equal
Feb	Is the novel with a purpose a literary mistake? N
Mar	Is club life desirable for women? N
Apr	Is the increase of newspaper and magazine articles detrimental to literature? A
May	Had William Morris, decorator, romance writer and poet, original genius? A
June	Discussion: heroines from history.
Nov	Is the reading of historical novels prejudicial to the true study of history? N
Dec	Should military conscription be adopted in this country? N
1900	
Jan	Does versatility make more for worldly success than thoroughness? A
Feb	Is music a higher form of art than the drama? N
Mar	Is decay of endurance a symptom of this age? N
Apr	Will Ruskin live as a social reformer rather than as an art critic? A
May	Should idiosyncrasies in childhood be encouraged? N
June	Discussion on favourite heroines in history.
Nov	Is R. L. S. greater as an essayist than as a novelist? A
Dec	Has theosophy benefited mankind? N
1901	
Jan	Does teaching in elementary schools afford as desirable a sphere for gentlewomen as in secondary schools? A
Feb	Was Oliver Cromwell a benefactor to his country? A

Mar	Should the same principles of morality prevail in public as in private life? A
Apr	Is it desirable that the housing of the poor be left to private enterprise? A
May	Has vaccination been beneficial to the nation? A
June	Discussion on pet economies.
Nov	Is the ideal of Browning's and Meredith's heroines a higher and more useful one than that of later writers? A
Dec	Do the lighter forms of agriculture afford a remunerative career for women? A
1902	
Jan	Should a higher standard of comfort be encouraged in the working classes? A
Feb	Should a statesman lead public opinion rather than follow the prevailing drift of it? A
Mar	Should parents spend money on the professional education of their daughters rather than be saving secure them a small competence? A
Apr	Is Victor Hugo greater as a novelist than as a poet? A
May	Is it better to be a slave to fashion than free and conspicuous? No decision.
June	Selections form authors descriptive of women.
Nov	Is the wider tolerance of the present day a sign of degeneracy? A
Dec	Should the legal profession be open to women? N
1903	
Jan	Does our national literature owe as much to Ireland as to Scotland? N
Feb	Is the art of conversation dying out? N
Mar	Do any modern novelists describe the life of today so well as Miss Austen did that of her period? A
Apr	Is the city of Edinburgh less beautiful and less pleasant as a residence than it was twenty years ago? N
May	Has the *mariage de convenance* some advantage over the so-called love marriage? N
June	Each member described the most ideal spot she had visited.

Nov	Has free education been a real boon to the people? N
Dec	Is the minute study of detached periods more educative than a more general survey of history? A
1904	
Jan	Is the fiscal policy of Mr Chamberlain worthy of support? A
Feb	Was the unification of Italy brought about be legitimate means? A
Mar	Is the present easy access to books injurious to the best interests of the community? N
Apr	Is gambling necessarily immoral? Equal
May	Should every woman have technical instruction in home duties? A
June	Discussion on statesmen.
Nov	Are Herbert Spencer's educational theories practicable? N
Dec	Is Matthew Arnold's depreciation of Burns justifiable? N
1905	
Jan	Is there any practical use in Tolstoy's teaching? A
Feb	That occasional solitude is necessary for the higher development. No vote.
Mar	Is Dante's 'Inferno' a finer poem than 'Paradise Lost'? No decision.
Apr	Should the immigration of pauper aliens be further regulated? A
May	Can parodies claim a place in high-class literature? N
June	Discussion: How to live on £1 a week.
Nov	Should the Parliamentary Suffrage be extended to duly qualified women? A
Dec	Are the present laws regarding access to mountains, hills, moors, too restrictive? A
1906	
Jan	Is Watts' interpretation of Art likely to be for all time? A
Feb	Has French literature qualities which compensate for the greater depth of German literature? A

Mar	Does our nation owe as much to Wellington as to Nelson? N
Apr	Should the lines followed in the George Junior Republic be largely adopted? No decision.
May	Should vacation schools for the poor be encouraged? A
June	Each member gave an illustration of wit.
Nov	Is the teaching of Browning's 'The Statue and the Bust' sound? N
Dec	Did the English treat Napoleon fairly during his imprisonment at St Helena? A
1907	
Jan	Is Rudyard Kipling greater as a poet than as a prose writer? N
Feb	Is Rider Haggard's scheme of national land settlement workable? A
Mar	Should the feeding of necessitous school children be left to voluntary effort? A
Apr	Can the French Revolution be justified? A
May	Are sports and games driving out culture? A
June	Discussion: favourite books of childhood.
Nov	Is the co-education of the sexes generally desirable? N
Dec	Sweated industries and their possible remedy. No vote.
1908	
Jan	Is the influence of Bernard Shaw beneficial? N
Feb	Is it desirable to give uncontributory old age pensions? N
Mar	Should foreign classics be read in translations before being studied in the original? A
Apr	Is the decay of a great nation inevitable? N
May	Is the reaction against self-sacrifice as the true ideal for woman doing harm? N
June	Each member to describe the most thrilling event of her life.
Nov	Should we evacuate Egypt? N
Dec	Has optimism done more for the world than pessimism? A

1909	
Jan	Are fairy tales of value in the education of children? A
Feb	Does the Raphaelite art of Italy transcend that of the later Renaissance? Equal
Mar	Have Lord Macaulay's historical and literary judgements on the whole stood the test of time? A
Apr	Can the end justify the means? A
May	Does the success of the drama at the present day depend too much on staging? N
June	Discussion: Open air schools.
Nov	Discussion: the Celtic revival and the desirability of teaching Gaelic in schools.
Dec	Are the respective ideals of Cavour greater than those of Bismarck n carrying out national unity? A
1910	
Jan	Is the break-up of the Poor Law desirable? N
Feb	Is Mrs Sutherland Orr's interpretation of 'Fifine at the Fair' a correct one? A
Mar	Have the benefits resulting form the American Civil War justified its cost? No decision.
Apr	Has Impressionism been carried too far in Art? A
May	No debate due to the death of King Edward.
June	Should the boy have stood on the burning deck? A
Nov	Has Wordsworth exercised a greater influence on the nineteenth century than Browning? A
Dec	Is war inevitable? A
1911	
Jan	Ought games to be used educationally? N
Feb	Was Tolstoy's message of practical value to the world? N
Mar	Is Browning's 'Grammarian' a safe guide for life? N
Apr	Was Fox a worthy rival to Pitt? A

May	Has the character of Mary of Guise been unfairly judged? A
June	Discussion on favourite fads.
Nov	Are the women and girls of the present day less womanly than those of fifty years ago? N
Dec	Is a high sense of honour specifically marked in the hereditary ruling caste? A
1912	
Jan	Is the Victorian Age of literature more worthy of the name of Augustan than that of Queen Anne? A
Feb	Does the luxury of the rich increase the poverty of the poor? N
Mar	Should there be universal training? A
Apr	Has the character of Dr Samuel Johnson been fairly estimated by the succeeding generations? A
May	Is partisanship a demerit in an historian? N
June	Discussion: is the bee the most interesting insect?
Nov	Is public opinion a greater factor in everyday life than private judgement? A
Dec	Is George Meredith among the immortals? A
1913	
Jan	Should a Second Chamber be popularly elected? N
Feb	Is the callousness of the East less harmful to national life and character than the humanitarianism of the West? N
Mar	Is Dickens as great as Thackeray? A
Apr	Is organised active resistance to the law ever justifiable? A
May	Should Thomas a Becket be considered a martyr? N
June	Discussion on poems.
Nov	Is morality the same for a nation as for an individual? A
Dec	Should our Penal Laws be deterrent rather than reformatory? A

1914	
Jan	Is it desirable that women should have the Parliamentary vote? A
Feb	Is a literary censorship desirable? A
Mar	Was Louis Napoleon a charlatan? N
Apr	Is George Eliot as great a novelist as Jane Austen? A
June	Discussion: Should afternoon calls still have a place in our social system?
Nov	Is it desirable to substitute a knowledge for a property qualification for the exercise of the Franchise? N
Dec	Are married person generally more selfish than unmarried? N
1915	
Jan	Does Carlyle share the responsibility for the modern German gospel of Force? A
Feb	Is the Montessori system of education deficient in the matter of discipline? A
Mar	Is Maeterlinck's outlook on life unhealthy? N
Apr	Does modern Russia owe more to Catherine the Great than to Tolstoy? A
May	Is it desirable to press for total prohibition during the War? A
June	Reading and discussion of war ballads.
Nov	Has the employment of women in work hitherto confined to men one the whole been a success? No decision.
Dec	Can any race in the world be considered as intrinsically subject? N
1916	
Jan	Has the establishment of the Peace Conference at the Hague been of benefit to the world? N
Feb	Does true appreciation require for its exercise higher mental qualities than adverse criticism? A
Mar	Has the Munroe Doctrine been of benefit to America? A
Apr	Are we justified in expecting a revival of romantic literature after the War? A
May	Has Aytoun formed a just estimate of Claverhouse? N

June	General discussion on literary and scientific coincidences.
Nov	Is a democracy a disadvantage in a time of national crisis? N
Dec	Resolution: That telepathy is to be recognised as a scientific fact. No decision.
1917	
Jan	Will there be a period of commercial and industrial depression in Great Britain after the War? N
Feb	Does external discipline conduce to self-control? A
Mar	Has Walt Whitman supplied an inspiring theory of life? N
Apr	Is self-advertisement a sign of inferiority? A
May	The legal official and social position of child welfare in Scotland. Discussion.
Nov	Does Frederick the Great compare favourably with Napoleon? N
Dec	Should University training be brought into closer relations with the industrial and commercial needs of the country? N
1918	
Jan	Are Wagner's music dramas the artistic expression of the perverted ideas of modern Germany? N
Feb	Does a girl gain more than she loses by being educated entirely at home? N
Mar	Is Zionism a desirable and practical project? A
Apr	Some Scottish gentlewomen of the nineteenth century. Discussion.
May	Should there be compulsory secondary education for all? N
Nov	Was the British Empire acquired by a deliberate policy of aggression? N
Dec	Do we learn more from the Drunken Helot than from the Shining Light? N
1919	
Jan	Does the War poetry of the day compare favourably with that of the Napoleonic era? N
Feb	Do the years give more than they take away? A
Mar	History of the Arab Race. Discussion.

Apr	Do Liberals and Conservatives become such from rational conviction rather than from temperament and hereditary influence? N
May	The League of Nations. Discussion. In favour, 14; Against, 4.
Nov	Should the Foreign policy of a country be subject to popular control? N
Dec	Does modern civilisation owe more to Italy than to France? A
1920	
Jan	Is the study of music of equal importance with other branches as part of an education? No decision.
Feb	Are idealists the salt of the earth? A
Mar	Does Schopenhauer, while decrying women, unconsciously do them honour? N
Apr	Has Pelmanism come to stay? N
May	Have cinemas a bad influence? N
Nov	Is the Victorian age of literature justly decried? N
Dec	Is the repugnant in Art admissible? N
1921	
Jan	Is the statement 'God's in his Heaven - all's right with the world' a true and reasonable creed? A
Feb	Was Ireland ever a nation? N
Mar	Is there in the present day too much interference with personal liberty? A
Apr	Should the whole truth be told in biography? A
May	Do the heroes of women novelists compare favourably with the heroines of men novelists? A
Nov	Is it justifiable that a country should sacrifice natural beauty to public utility? A
Dec	Is the intellectual woman less fitted for the domestic sphere? N
1922	
Jan	Is a world state desirable? N

Feb	Is the surplus woman Britain's strength? A
Mar	Is Moliere among the immortals? A
Apr	Is the simple life a practicable proposition? A
May	Is make-up morally degrading? N
Nov	Is auto-suggestion likely to benefit humanity? A
Dec	Was Hamlet mad? N
1923	
Jan	Is Christian Socialism a contradiction in terms? A
Feb	Is civilisation the exclusive heritage of the Latin races? N
Mar	Is idealism in literature of greater physiological value than realism? A
Apr	Can Barrie be placed in the first rank of present-day writers of fiction and plays? A
May	Form which the Scottish National War Memorial should take. Discussion.
Nov	Should the voluntary system for the maintenance of hospitals be continued? A
Dec	Has time justified Byron's contemporary fame? N
1924	
Jan	Dutch Art in the seventeenth century, with special reference to Ver Meer of Delft. Discussion.
Feb	Should capital punishment be abolished? N
Mar	Is the continued existence of a leisured class a benefit to the community? A
Apr	Is frugal living the ideal environment of youth? A
May	Has the modern girl less charm than the Victorian maiden? N
Nov	Is patriotism a higher ideal for the world than internationalism? A
Dec	Is R. L. Stevenson the equal of Charles Lamb as an essayist? N
1925	
Jan	The permanent cure of the feeble-minded. Discussion.

Feb	Is progress (the boast of our modern civilisation) real? A
Mar	Does Abraham Lincoln compare favourably with the great European statesmen? A
Apr	Is the League of Nations more likely to promote the peace of the world than the old balance of power? A
May	Does the habit of debating induce in the debater exaggerated and one-sided views? N
Nov	Is the British Fascist Movement likely to produce class warfare? No decision.
Dec	Is Bernard Shaw's presentment of Joan of Arc in his famous play satisfactory? A
1926	
Jan	George Eliot as a psychological novelist. Discussion.
Feb	has the Russian Revolution been an unmixed evil to that country? A
Mar	Has superstition aided the development of national character? N
Apr	Is the poetry of poets living in 1825 equal to that of poets living in 1925? A
May	General discussion.
Nov	The desirability of retaining the use of the vernacular. No decision.
Dec	Is spiritualism an antidote to materialism? N
1927	
Jan	Were the American colonies entirely justified in breaking away from the Mother Country? A
Feb	Does sport occupy too large a place in modern life? N
Mar	Is punishment essential to the training of character? N
Apr	Are there some elements of greatness in the ex-Kaiser's character? N
May	A general discussion on the books of last five years that are of most value to the world.
Nov	Sanity in Art. Discussion.
Dec	Does tradition play too large a part in education? A

1928

Jan	Does a restricted birth-rate coupled with reversed selection tend to lower the intellectual level of the nation? A
Feb	Is perfect tact compatible with absolute sincerity? A
Mar	Does Hugh Walpole compare favourably with Anthony Trollope as a delineator of life in a cathedral town? N
Apr	Is there any truth in the Atlantis legend? A
May	Does the French marriage system compare favourably with the British? No vote.
Nov	Has the British Representative System when adopted by other European nations been justified by its results? A
Dec	Is idealism a hindrance rather than a help to a statesman? N

1929

Jan	Will the reputation of Oliver Goldsmith outlive that of Bernard Shaw? A
Feb	Is trial by jury the best way of securing justice? A
Mar	Is the influence of Scott better than that of Burns on the Scottish nation? N
Apr	Is modern tolerance the product of indifference? N
May	Should there be zoos? No vote.
Nov	Does social legislation weaken the national character? A
Dec	Is Alice Meynell superior as a poetess to Christina Rossetti? N

1930

Jan	Will spiritual healing eventually take the place of ordinary medical treatment? N
Feb	Should social intercourse between white and coloured races be encouraged? N
Mar	Impressions of the Italian Art Exhibition at Burlington House. Discussion.
Nov	Was the materialism of the nineteenth century as great as the critics of the twentieth declare it to have been? N
Dec	Should the qualification for the Poet Laureate be the power to appeal to popular sentiment rather than that of high poetic diction? A

1931	
Jan	Can there be the same code of morality for nations as for individuals? N
Feb	Team debate. Does Prohibition tend to degenerate a nation? A
Mar	Is tragedy still the great test of acting? Equal
Apr	Are Arctic Expeditions and attempts to reach Mount Everest supreme folly? N
May	Are Post-War conditions more comfortable than Pre-War? No vote.
Nov	Is town life preferable to country? A
Dec	Is Scotland losing her identity? A
1932	
Jan	Does Scott still appeal to the present age? A
Feb	Impressions of the Exhibition of French Art at Burlington House. Discussion.
Apr	Does the cinema educate more than it demoralises? A
May	Have the Marthas of the world more influence than the Marys? No decision.
Nov	Was Napoleon the colossal failure of history? N
Dec	Should there be a separate Parliament for Scotland? N
1933	
Jan	Should every girl be trained to compete in the open market? N
Feb	Do anthologies encourage an interest in literature? N
Mar	Is Galsworthy greater as a dramatist than a novelist? N
Apr	Should a woman take her husband's nationality? N
May	A general discussion upon what each member held as her ideal man.
Nov	Is Fascism making for the happiness and prosperity of Italy? A
Dec	Has mechanical progress made life more worth living? A

1934

Jan	A literary causerie was held at which each member read a favourite passage from English prose.
Feb	Is it good for children to get their own way? N
Mar	Has the influence of Jews on Western Civilisation been more beneficial than harmful? A

Appendix 2 - Personal details of members of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society and the frequency of their participation in debates

Title	First Name	Surname	Address	Date of joining Society	Involved in debating (years)	No. of debates involved in
Miss	Sarah Siddons	Mair	29 Abercromby Place / 5 Chester Street	1865/6	68/69/69/69/72/72/73/73/73/74/74/75/76/76/77/79/79/79/80/80/81/82/82/84/84/85/86/90/91/93/93/94/95/95/95/95/99/01/02/02/04/05/05/06/06/07/07/08/08/10/11/12/12/14/15/17/18/19/20/20/21/21/21/22/23/23/24/27/28/29/32/33	73
Miss	Helen	Reid	Albany Street, Leith	1865/6	73/73/80/	3
Miss	Robina	Warrack	St. Catherine's Bonnington	1865/6	76/78/82/83/	4
Miss	Agnes	Niel	Warriston Crescent	1865/6	67/68/73	3
Miss	Charlotte	Carmichael (Mrs Stopes)	Malta Terrace	1865/6	67/68/73/74/75/78/78/78/79/10	10
Miss	Charlotte	Bell	6 Melville Street	1865/6	87/88/89/90/90/90/91/91/92/93/94/95	12
Miss	Kate	Macdougall	Buckingham Terrace	1865/6		0
Miss	Mary	Lees	14 Pitt Street & Clarence St	1865/6	68/68/91/94/95/95/96/98/99/01/01/03/04/07/08/08/09/10/10/10/11/12/13/13/14/15/17/18/18	29
Miss	Elizabeth	Jopp	30 Albany Street	1865/6		0
Miss	Bessie	Scott Moncrieff	Great King Street	1865/6	68/80/83/84/85	5
Miss	Gertrude	Robertson	Drummond Place	1865/6	68/70/83/85/87/88/89	7
Miss	Elsie	Stirling of Kippendavie (Mrs Kellie McCallum	Kensington	1865/6		0
Miss	Philadelphia	Fraser (Mrs J.B.T. Robertson)		1865/6		0
Miss	Katherine	Tuke (Mrs Fraser)	21 Charlotte Square	1865/6	80/	1
Miss		Cobbin (Mrs Miller of Alassio)	London	1865/6	79/	1
Miss	Eliza	Gillespie (Mrs Lees)	53 Northumberland St	1865/6	67/68/68/69/69/72/73/74/	8
Miss	Catherine E.	Guthrie Wright	4 Bruntsfield Terrace	1865/6	79/81/83/84/84/91	6
Miss		Stewart	25 East Claremont St	1865/6	73/78	2
Mrs		Torrop		1867		0
Mrs		Douglas		1867		0
Mrs		Rankin	Trinity	1867		0
Miss		Kilgour	York Place	1867		0
Miss	M.	Neil	Warriston Crescent	1867		0
Miss	J.	Reid	Albany Street, Leith	1867		0
Miss		Marshall	28 Abercromby Place	1867		0
Miss	M.S.	Seton	St. Bennet's, Greenhill Gardens, Morningside	1867	68/75/75/76	4
Miss	A.	Andrew	Albany Street	1867		0
Miss		Crawford Pollock	Pollock Castle, Ayrshire	1867		0

Title	First Name	Surname	Address	Date of joining Society	Involved in debating (years)	No. of debates involved in
Miss		Carr		1867		0
Mrs		Lawton		1867		0
Miss		Murray Dunlop (later life of Prof. Lindsay)		1867	67/68/69/71	4
Miss		Scott	3 Gayfield Square	1867		0
Miss	Mary Lundie	Bonar (later Mrs. Rev. Dodds)	10 Palmerston Road	1867		0
Miss		Logan	Great King Street	1867		0
Miss		Ritchie		1867		0
Miss		McNab	Inverleith Row	1867		0
Miss		Bryans	England	1867		0
Miss		Campbell		1867	68/73	2
Miss		Guthrie		1867		0
Miss		Finlay		1867		0
Miss		Buchanan	6 Albert Terrace	1867		0
Miss	Fleeming	Jenkins	31 Heriot Row	1868		0
Miss		Anderson	4 Atholl Place	1868		0
Miss		Walker	Bolling Hall, Bradford	1868	68/74	2
Miss		Menzies	Greenhill Gardens	1868		
Miss		Leblanc	3 Randolph Cliff	1868		0
Miss		Clark		1868	78/	1
Miss		Froebel	9 Gloucester Place	1868	19/20/20/20/22/22/23/24/ 27/27/	10
Miss		Cornish				0
Mrs		Warrack	14 Carlton Terrace	1869	68	1
Miss		Thin	Birkenhead	1869		0
Miss		Graham		1869		0
Miss		Dunsmure	10 Coates Crescent	1869		0
Miss		Craig	7 Hope Street	1869	69/	1
Misses		Thomson	1 Brandon Street	1870	80/03	2
Miss	M.E.	Anderson	13 Stafford Street	1870		0
Miss		Smytton	3 Walker Street	1870		0
Miss		Leitch	Gayfield Square	1870		0
Miss	Elisa	Stevenson	Braidview, Morningside Place & 13 Randolph Cres	1870	85	1
Miss	S.	Clarke	10 Duncan Street	1870		0
Miss	Helen	Neaves	7 Charlotte Square & 3 Ainslie Place	1870	72/80/80/80/80/82/83/83/ 83/84/84/84/85/85/85/86/ 89/90/90/90/91/91/91/92/ 92/93/93/94/94/95/95/95/ 96/96/96/97/99/00/01/01/ 02/02/02/04/04/05/06/06/ 07/08/09/10/12/13/13/13/ 14/15/15/15/15/16/16/17/ 17/18/19/19/20/20/21/22/ 23/23/24/24	76
Miss	Lizzie	Burton	Craighouse, Lothian Burn, Morningside	1870		0

Title	First Name	Surname	Address	Date of joining Society	Involved in debating (years)	No. of debates involved in
Miss		Spalding	19 Raeburn Place	1870	73/73/	2
Miss		Neilson	1 North Charlotte St	1870		0
Miss		Teesdale	5 Merchiston Place	1870		0
Miss	E.	Anderson	11 Inverleith Row	1870		0
Miss		Macduff	Inveralmond House, Crammond	1870		0
Miss		Colville Rodger	45 Ann Street	1871		0
Miss		Smith	Wyhill, Andover	1871		0
Mrs		Curle	Hamilton Tce, London	1871	83/	1
Miss		Brewster Macpherson	Belleville, Kingussie	1871		0
Miss		Innes	70 Northumberland St.	1871	77/	1
Miss	Elizabeth	Oswald	Southfield, Canaan Lane	1871	72/73/73/73/73/74/74/74/ 75/76/76/77/77/77/77/78/ 78/78/79/79/79/79/80/81/ 81/82/82/83/84/84/84/85/ 85/85/86/86/87/88/88/89/ 89/89/90/90/91/91/91/91/ 93/93/94/95/96/96/98/98/ 98/99/99/99/01/01/02	63
Miss	R.	Balfour	Pilrig House	1871	79/	1
Mrs	Henry	Gillson	High Elms, Streatham Common, London	1871		0
Miss		Micking	Burnbrae, Helensburgh	1871		0
Mrs		Campbell (Mrs Miller Morrison)		1871	71/75/75/76/77/78/79/80/ 80/81/82/82/83/83/83/84/ 86/86/87/87/88/88/89/89/ 89/90/90/91/91/91/91/93/ 93/94/97/97/98/01/01/03/ 04/04/10/11/11	45
Miss		Lindsay	7 Great Stuart Street	1871	76/85	2
Miss	E.H.	Dudding	St. Peter's Vicarage, St. Albans	1871		0
Miss		Muir	9 Chalmers St	1872		0
Mrs		Coventry	29 Moray Place	1872	73/	1
Mrs		Grant	Rothiemurchas	1872		0
Mrs		Jeffreys Johnson		1872		0
Miss		Nicholson	Ramsay Garden	1872		0
Miss		Houldsworth	Springfield House, Lasswade	1872		0
Miss		Lushington		1872		0
Miss		Hamilton	16 Great King St	1872	75/75/76/76	4
Miss		Penney	35 Moray Place	1872	93/	1
Miss	Margaret	Kellie McCallum	14 Royal Circus	1872		0
Miss		Humphrey	11 Carlton St	1872	73/75/76/79/80	5
Mrs		Inglis	The Hawthorns, Merchiston	1872		0
The Hon. Mrs		Greenhill Gardyne	Finhaven, Forfarshire	1872	76/77/77/78/78/79/80/84/ 86/88/89/03/03	13

Title	First Name	Surname	Address	Date of joining Society	Involved in debating (years)	No. of debates involved in
Miss		Henslowe	Langport, Somerset	1872		0
Miss		Berry	Parkhill, Fylingdales, near Whitby	1872		0
Miss	Grey	Jones	Newport, Monmouth	1872	73	1
Mrs	Henry	Cadell	London	1873		0
Miss		Baildon	Princes St	1873		0
Miss		Charteris	44 Inverleith Row	1873		0
Miss		Dundas Scott	Briery Gardens, Hawick	1873		0
Miss (Dame)	Louisa Innes	Lumsden	Aberdeen	1873	16/16/16/17/18/19/20/20/21/21/21/22/25/27/	14
Miss		Kay	Morningside	1873		0
Miss	H.	MacLaren		1873	76	1
Miss		Rowatt	7 Palmerston Road	1873		0
Mrs		Wyld	Inverleith Row	1873	74	1
Miss	Jemima	Bannerman (Mrs Campbell Lorimer)		1873	77/84/90/91/95/98/98/99/00/01/02/04/05/07/07/11/12/15/16/18/19/19/23/29/	24
Miss	Maria	Bell	Eton Tce	1873	78/84/84/85/85/86/97	7
Miss		Sandeman		1873		0
Miss		Whiteside		1873		0
Miss	B	MacLaren	13 Carlton Tce	1873	81/	1
Miss		Riddell	39 Chalmers St	1873		0
Miss	Annie	McKenzie	13 Great Stuart Street	1873		0
Miss		Haig	16 Lansdowne Cres	1873		0
Mrs		Gunn of Reitgill	9 Melville St	1873		0
Miss		White	Whitehouse Lea, Merchiston	1873	90/	1
Miss	Flora	Stevenson	13 Randolph Cres	1873	71/86	2
Miss		Jeffrey		1873	74/	1
Mrs		Scott	Blairgowrie	1873		0
Miss	Frances Helen	Simson	London (1874: 2 St Colme St)	1873	77/	1
Miss		Lorimer		1873	85/87	2
Miss		Menzies	3 Grosvenor Cres	1873	73/74/75/75/75/76/76/76/76/77/77/78/78/79/79/79/79/81/82/82/85/86/86/87/87/88/91/92/93/93/94/95/97/97/98/98/00/01/02/02/05	41
Miss	M.C.	Haig		1873		0
Miss	I	Robertson	Great King Street	1873	83/85/86/91/93/95	6
Miss	Laura	Heyworth	Manchester	1873		0
Miss		Winscombe	England	1873	74	1
Miss		Horsburgh	66 Northumberland St	1874		0
Miss		Smith	66 Northumberland St	1874		0
Madame		Kuntz	19 Royal Circus	1874	81/	1
Miss		Thomson	27 Walker St	1874	81/	1

Title	First Name	Surname	Address	Date of joining Society	Involved in debating (years)	No. of debates involved in
Mrs		Palmer	8 Gilmore Place	1874	74/74	2
Miss	Grace C.	Wood	4 Oxford Tce	1874	73/74/76/79/80/80/80/84/84/86/86/86/87/88/89/89/90/90/90/91/96/22/33/	23
Miss		Mathieson	19 Northumberland St	1874		0
Miss		McGrigor	The Den, Perth	1874		0
Miss		Stewart	14 Alva St	1874		0
Miss		Haswell		1874	76	1
Miss	Jane	Haswell		1874		0
Miss	Adela	Pitt Dundas	14 Atholl Cres	1874	75/75/75/75/75/76/76/78/79/79/80/81/83/83/84/85/85/85/86/86/98/98	22
Miss		Marshall	28 Abercromby Place	1874		0
Miss	Mary Jane	Urquhart	5 St Colme Street	1874	75/76/76/77/77/78/78/79/79/79/80/80/83/84/84/85/86/87/89/90/91/94/95/97/98/00/00/00/01/02/04/05/07/08/09/10/	36
Miss		Wightwick	Dane John House, Canterbury	1874		0
Miss	L	Somerville		1874		0
Miss		Ballantyne	Rutland Square	1874		0
Miss		Muller	23 Abercromby Place	1874		0
Mrs		McFarlane	Ruthwell Manse	1874		0
Miss		Balfour	1 Rosebery Cres	1874		0
Mrs		Lockhart Thomson	20 Coates Cres	1874		0
Miss	J	Raleigh	Park House Grange	1874		0
Miss	Flora	Haig	16 Lansdowne Cres	1874		0
Miss	Emily	Riley	Southfield, Wigan	1874		0
Miss		Battaye	Westbourne Grove Tce, Bayswater	1874		0
Miss		Hawlings	Boyne Lodge	1875		0
Miss	Sarah	Langley	Knockamuir	1875		0
Miss		Schaab	31 Rutland Square	1875		0
Miss		Robertson	38 India Street	1875		0
Miss	Anne	Dundas	Polton	1875	75/76/77/78/79/79/81/88/89/90/90/90/91/91/92/93/95/96	18
Miss		Muirhead	Viewpark	1875		0
Miss		Macdonald	Kames Castle, Bute	1875	99/	1
Miss	S.B.	Balfour		1875	78/82/00	3
Mrs		Maynard	24 Manor Place	1875		0
Miss		Brown	2 Greenhill Tce	1875		0
Mrs		Balfour Brown		1875		0
Miss		Schwabe	2 Glenorchy Tce	1875	76/76/77/83	4
Miss		Gow Campbell	Newcastle	1875		0
Miss		Barkus	7 Prior's Tce, Teignmouth	1875		0

Title	First Name	Surname	Address	Date of joining Society	Involved in debating (years)	No. of debates involved in
Miss		Laycock (Mrs Stirling Boyd)				0
Miss	G.	Smail	40 Coates Cres	1876	79/	1
Mrs		Lorimer	Dundee	1876	82/	1
Mrs		Robertson	2 Marchmont Tce	1876		0
Mrs		Geddes	2 Blacket Place	1876	89/	1
Miss	Fanny	Graham	30 Buckingham Tce	1876		0
Mrs		Mackay	Free Church Manse, Lochinver	1876		0
Mrs		Middleton	Rose Farm, Invergordon	1876		0
Miss	Louisa	Dundas	14 Atholl Cres (1893-28 Drumsheugh Gdns)	1876	76/76/77/77/78/78/79/79/80/80/82/82/77/80/82/82/83/83/85/86/88/88/88/88/88/90/91/91/93/93/93/94/94/94/95/95/96/96/96/96/97/98/98/99/99/99	46
Miss		Milland	4 Melville Cres	1876		0
Miss		Robinson	21 Clarendon Cres	1876		0
Miss		Ray	23 Torpichen St	1876	74/76/77/77/78/78/78/80/	8
Miss		Cochran-Patrick	Ladylands, Beith, Ayrshire	1876	89/90/90/91/93/99/99/03	8
Miss		Buckland	2 Euston Square, London	1877		0
Miss		Bankhead	2 Coates Place	1877		0
Miss	Alice	Wyld	11 Lennoz St	1877		0
Miss	Gillon	Ferguson	Chester St	1877	77/	1
Miss		Lewis	82 George Sq	1877	77/	1
Mrs		Morrison Duncan	Naughton, Fife	1877	79	1
Miss	F.	Gair	Falkirk	1877	78/	1
Mrs		McLaren	1 Drumsheugh Gdns	1877		0
Miss	Mary R.	Walker	Cupar & 6 Lonsdale Tce	1877	79/	1
Miss		Martin	19 Chester St	1877		0
Miss		Stewart	6 Coates Place	1877		0
Miss		Tod	1 Oxford Tce	1877		0
Miss		Cameron	24 Queen St	1877		0
Mrs		Davidson	57 Lauriston Place	1877		0
Miss		Watson	12 Clifton Tce	1877		0
Miss		Messieux	Great King Street	1878		0
Miss		Black	6 Darnaway St	1878	91/	1
Miss	Elizabeth	Smail	40 Coates Gardens	1878	77/	1
Miss		Alban	37 Manor Place	1878		0
Miss	Johanna	Dundas	25 St Andrews Square	1878		0
Miss	Ella	Kay		1878		0
Miss	Fraser	Tytler	36 Melville St	1878	79/83	2
Miss		Young	3 Albany St	1878	80/80/81	3

Title	First Name	Surname	Address	Date of joining Society	Involved in debating (years)	No. of debates involved in
Miss		Wright	4 Glengyle Tce	1879		0
Miss		Reynolds		1879	79/	1
Miss	M.A.	Cunningham	17 Salisbury Road	1880		0
Miss		Waterston		1880	80/	1
Mrs	Catherine	Fraser	31 Regent Terrace	1880	80/	1
Mrs	Arthur	Briggs	96 George Street	1880		0
Miss		Gibson		1880		0
Mrs		Masson	38 Great King Street	1881	03/	1
Madame		Froebel	9 Gloucester Place	1881	81/	1
Miss		Wilson	London	1881		0
Miss	Auldjo	Jamieson	58 Melville St	1881		0
Mrs		de la Cour	17 Inverleith Row	1881	89	1
Mrs		Crawford		1881		0
Miss	Flora	Masson	58 Great King Street	1881	77/77/77/83/91/93/93/95/98/03	10
Mdlle.		Hagreife		1881		0
Miss		Goldie		1881		0
Miss		Archer		1881	78/	1
Mrs		Gilles Smith	Drumsheugh Gardens	1881		0
Miss		Moffat		1881	87	1
Mrs	Alexander	Wood	12 Strathearn Place	1881	82/83	2
Miss		Kerr	12 Walker Street	1881	82/82/83/85/85/87/87	7
Miss		Murray		1881	83	1
Miss		Craigie		1881		0
Miss		Warrick		1881		0
Miss		Henderson		1882		0
Miss	Blanche	Dundas	Melville Castle	1882	82/	1
Mrs		Lake		1882		0
Miss		Robertson		1882		0
Miss		Trotter	Colinton	1882	83/	1
Miss	Helen	Murray		1882		0
Miss	Clara	Maclaren	34 Buckingham Terrace	1882	83	1
Miss	Louisa	Hope	11 Polwarth Tce	1882	82	1
Mrs	M.S.	Thomson	Musselburgh	1882	83	1
Mrs	Douglas	Maclagan	Eton Terrace	1882	84	1
Miss		Forsyth	Tobermory	1882	84/85/86/86/87/88/88/95/	8
Miss	M	Wood	Clarendon Cres	1882	83/83/85/88/89/89/91/91/91/93/93/94/94/95/95/95/95/97/98/01	20
Miss	Edith	Wood	Clarendon Cres	1882		0
Miss	G	Methven		1882	95/01/04/05/06/07/08	7
Mrs		Crabb		1882	83/	1
Miss		Macandrew	16 York Place	1882		0
Miss	I	Macandrew	16 York Place	1882		0
Miss	Eliza	Bonar	10 Palmerston Road	1883	83/84/86/90	4
Miss		Kennedy		1883	90/94/	2

Title	First Name	Surname	Address	Date of joining Society	Involved in debating (years)	No. of debates involved in
Mrs		Trotter	Colinton	1883		0
Mrs		Norie	Murrayfield	1883		0
Lady		Douglas		1883		0
Miss	Isabella	Wood		1883		0
Miss		Campbell	51 Lauriston Place	1883	85/86/87/88	4
Miss		Newbigging	28 Heriot Row	1883		0
Miss	Alice	Neaves	7 Charlotte Square	1883	82/84/98/99/02/03/03/05/ 07/08/08/09/11/11/11/15/ 18/18/21/24/25/25/25/26/ 26/27/27/28/29/29/30/30/ 30/31/31/32/32/33/33/34	40
Miss		Gordon	Great Stuart Street	1883		0
Mrs	Arthur	Mitchell (Lady Mitchell)	34 Drummond Place	1883		0
Miss		Aytoun	28 Inverleith Row	1883		0
Miss		Mason	17 Howard Place	1883	86/	1
Mrs	Alexander	Whyte	52 Melville Street	1883	87/	1
Mrs		Mcbryde	16 Chester Street	1883	84/85/86/87/87/	5
Mrs		Fleming	18 Blacket Place	1883	86/	1
Mrs	Baldwin	Brown	George Square	1883	85/	1
Miss	Kate	Moffat		1884	86/	1
Mrs	Kenneth	Mackenzie	Northumberland St	1884		0
Mrs		Schultz	6 Great Stuart Street	1884		0
Miss	L	Terrot	Carlton Street	1884	87/	1
Miss	Louisa H.	Stevenson	13 Randolph Crescent	1884	91/00/00	3
Miss		Falconer		1884		0
Mrs		McCandlish	27 Drumsheugh Gdns	1884		0
Mrs		Coutts		1884		0
Mrs		Mather		1884		0
Mrs		Forsyth	Tobermory	1884		0
Miss		Black	6 Oxford Tce	1884	84/	1
Miss	Margaret	Tweedie	George Square	1884		0
Miss	A	Ivory	St Roque's Morningside	1884	13/14/15/18/20/22/23/31	8
Miss		Morice	4 Montbello, Joppa	1885		0
Miss	Louisa	Lorimer	1 Bruntsfield Cres	1885	86/87/96	3
Miss	Margaret	Weir	17 Royal Tce	1885	85/	1
Miss		Sutherland	22 Thirlestane Road	1885		0
Mrs		Vertue	10 Albyn Place	1885		0
Mrs	Susan	Findlay	3 Rothesay Tce	1886	91/91/94	3
Mrs		Bankhead		1886		0
Miss		Armour	65 Morningside Road	1886	86/86/87/87/88/89	6
Miss	C.	Armour	65 Morningside Road	1886	88/	1
Mrs		Bruce	3 Melville Cres	1886		0
Mrs		Milne Rae	Lauriston Gardens	1886	86/86	2
Miss	Florence	Raeburn	49 Manor Place	1886	89/	1
Miss	A	Stewart		1886		0
Miss		Merryweather		1886		0

Title	First Name	Surname	Address	Date of joining Society	Involved in debating (years)	No. of debates involved in
Miss		Brymner		1886	87/87/88/88/88/89/89	7
Miss	Ida	Aitken	9 Manor Place	1887		0
Miss		Dowie	21 Merchiston Tce	1887	87/88/94/	3
Miss		Burnet	29 Great King St	1887	87/88/89	3
Mrs	G	Methven	6 Bellevue Cres	1887	87/02	2
Mrs		Geddes	6 James Street, Lawnmarket	1887		0
Mrs		Jameson	22 Douglas Cres	1887	14/	1
Miss		Furley	21 Nelson St	1887	87/	1
Miss	Eva	Hendry	29 Rutland Square	1887		0
Miss	Eugenie	Tod		1887		0
Miss	Edith	Peterkin	Fairholm, Granton	1887		0
Mrs		Meldrum	40 Melville Street	1887		0
Miss	Rachel	Wallace	66 Northumberland St	1888		0
Miss		Duncanson	24 Inverleith Row	1888	89/90/95/00/01/02/02/03/ 04/04/13	11
Miss		Ogilvie	25 Walker St	1888	90/90/92/94/95/96/96/98	8
Mrs		Roget	Wemyss Place	1888	89/90	2
Miss		Boyd	11 Abercromby Place	1889		0
Mrs		Watson	15 Clarendon Cres	1889		0
Miss	H.	Sym	21 Belgrave Cres	1889		0
Miss		Black	Laverockbank Road	1889		0
Miss		Anderson	20 Inverleith Row	1889	01/	1
Miss	S.	Findlay	3 Rothesay Tce	1889	91/94/95/96/96/98/00	7
Miss	Helen	Guthrie	8 Albert Terrace	1890	91/02/04/06/07/10	6
Miss		Hutchison Stirling	4 Laverockbank Road, Trinity	1890	91/91/92/	3
Mrs		Balfour	2 Rothesay Tce	1890		0
Miss		Hanna	7 Magdala Cres	1890	93/94/05/12/13/13	6
Miss	K.E.	MacGeorge	10 Albyn Place	1890		0
Miss	Rosaline	Masson	58 Great King Street	1890	91/91/99	3
Miss		Lang	6 Belford Tce	1891	91/94/	2
Miss		Murray Dunlop	Heriot Row	1891		0
Miss		Towse	24 Belgrave Cres	1891		0
Miss		Brown	Alva Street	1891		0
Miss		Nelson	St Leonard's	1891		0
Miss		Dundas	Ochentyre, Stirling	1891		0
Miss	Lydia	Miller Mackay	3 Douglas Cres	1891		0
Mrs		Fraser	42 Melville St	1891		0
Mrs		Struthers	24 Buckingham Tce	1891		0
Miss		Findlay	3 Ann Street	1891		0
Miss		Scott	Ashbrooke	1891	91/	1
Mrs		Bushby	3 Magdala Cres	1891		0
Mrs		Pringle	18 Rutland Square	1891	91/	1
Miss		Parry	8 Great Stuart Street	1891		0

Title	First Name	Surname	Address	Date of joining Society	Involved in debating (years)	No. of debates involved in
Miss	Eliza Scott	Kirkland	13 Raeburn Place	1892		0
Miss	Barbara	Rainy	23 Douglas Cres	1892		0
Miss	H.	Wright	7 Chester Stereet	1892		0
Mrs		Forbes Mackay	26 George Square	1892		0
Miss	Eliza	Wigham	5 South Grey Street	1892	91/	1
Miss		Stephenson	9 Oxford Tce	1892		0
Miss		Purves	89 Great King Street	1892		0
Miss		Cheyne	18 Glencairn Cres	1892		0
Miss		Forbes Mackay	26 George Square	1892		0
Miss		More-Nisbet	12 Atholl Cres	1892	93/93/	2
Miss	Dora	Foster	1 Moredun Cres	1893		0
Miss	E.	McGeorge	28 Great King Street	1893		0
Miss		McKenzie	George Street	1893		0
Mrs		Williamson	21 Ravelston Park	1893	94/95/95/98/98/00/00/00/ 00/01/02/02/03/03/06/06/ 07/12/12/13/13/15/16/16/ 18/19/21	27
Miss		Muir	Dean Park House	1893		0
Miss		Grant	20 Clarendon Cres	1893		0
Mrs	John	Stuart-Gray	14 Alva Street	1893	93/93/94	3
Miss		McLeod	20 Coates Cres	1893		0
Mrs	David	Dundas	7 St Colme St	1893		0
Mrs		Maxton Graham	40 Heriot Row	1894	94/95/98/98/98/00/00/01/ 07/11	10
Miss		Blackburn	4 Fingal Place	1894		0
Miss	Harriet	Davidson	18 Merchiston Tce	1894		0
Miss	Agnes	Bell	28 Hartington Place	1894	80/	1
Miss		Sanders	143 Princes Street	1894		0
Miss	Lily	Dalziel	5 Merchiston Cres	1894		0
Miss		de Quincey	3 Magdala Cres	1894		0
Mrs		Laidlaw	8 Merchiston Ave	1894	96/	1
Miss		Mackintosh	1 Douglas Cres	1895		0
Mrs		Munro	48 Manor Place	1895		0
Mrs		Marshall	19 Coates Gdns	1895	96/99/	2
Miss		Cooper	15 Ravelston Park	1895		0
Mrs		Middleton	24 Douglas Cres	1895		0
Mrs		Mitchell Thomson	6 Charlotte Square	1895		0
Miss		Renton	6 Clarendon Cres	1895		0
Miss		White	North Trinity House	1895		0
Miss		Lorimer	9 Gloucester Place	1896		0
Mrs	Hugh	Barbour	4 Charlotte Square	1896	98/	1
Miss		Dowie	11 Learmonth Tce	1896		0
Mrs		Burnley Campbell	Ormidale, Argyllshire	1896	09/	1
Miss		Macgregor	Forfarshire	1896		0
Miss		Gillan	10 Palmerston Place	1896	98/00/01/02/05/07	6
Miss	M.H.	Cheyne	10 Chester Street	1896		0

Title	First Name	Surname	Address	Date of joining Society	Involved in debating (years)	No. of debates involved in
Miss		Mann	27 Pilrig Street	1896	97/98/99/99/00/01/01/02/ 02/02/03/04/04/06/09/09/ 09/10/10	19
Mrs		Douglas	12 Bruntsfield Cres	1897	98/	1
Miss	Nepean	Smith	10 Eton Tce	1897		0
Miss		Scott Moncrieff	43 Magdala Cres	1897	97/98/12/13	4
Mrs		Campbell Penney	11 Gloucester Place	1897		0
Miss		Heron Watson	16 Charlotte Square	1897		0
Mrs		Anderson	11 Lynedoch Place	1897		0
Mrs	Richard	Cochrane	6 Oxford Tce	1897		0
Miss		Brooke	19 Montpelier Park	1897		0
Miss	C.M.	Mackenzie	46 Ann Street	1897	94/95/96/96/98/09	6
Miss		Rose	3 Hillside Cres	1898		0
Miss	Barbara	Fordyce	18 Douglas Cres	1898		0
Mrs		Reid	11 Magdala Cres	1898		0
Lady		Glasgow	62 Palmerston Place	1898		0
Mrs		Hotson	4 Rothesay Tce	1898		0
Miss		Wright	14 Ann Street	1898	01/	1
Miss	C.W.	Haig	87 Comely Bank Avenue	1898		0
Miss	S.M.	Wrightman	7 Darnaway St	1898		0
Mrs		Bruce	3 Melville Cres	1898		0
Miss		Gillan	Bon Accord Tce, Aberdeen	1898		0
Mdlle.		Bos	18 Maitland St	1898		0
Miss		Lowson	17 Randolph Cres	1898		0
Miss		Gordon	8 Forres St	1898		0
Mrs	James	Ivory	16 Coates Gdns	1898	00/02/07/08	4
Miss		Murray	78 Great King Street	1899		0
Mrs	Erskine	Murray	13 Lynedoch Place	1899	03/04	2
Mrs		Melville	16 Dean Tce	1899	99/03/03/04/04/04/06/07/ 07/07/08/09/10/11/12/13/ 13/14/14/14/16/17/18/21/ 21/22	26
Miss		Dundas Scott	25 Inverleith Row	1899	01/	1
Mrs		Cadenhead	14 Ramsay Gdns	1899		0
Mrs		Andrews	14 Howe Street	1899		0
Miss		Carstairs	15 Melville St	1899	00/	1
Miss		Shurmer	8 Cambridge St	1899	99/01	2
Miss		Millar	59 George St	1899	04/	1
Mrs		Lyon	73 Great King Street	1899		0
Mrs		Forman	51 Great King Steet	1899		0
Mrs	Shaw	Maclaren	14 Walker St	1900	00/02/02	3
Miss	A.	Tod	23 Buckingham Tce	1900	00/	1
Miss		Kissock	9 Upper Gilmore Place	1900		0

Title	First Name	Surname	Address	Date of joining Society	Involved in debating (years)	No. of debates involved in
Mrs		Arnott	Holland House, Murrayfield	1900	00/01/02/02/03/03/04/06/06/07/09/09/10/11/11/12/12/15/15/16/16/17/17/18/19/19/20/20/21/22/22/23/24/25/30/30/31/32/32/33/34/	41
Miss		Dakers	13 Inverleith Row	1900		0
Mrs		Voge	46 Gilmore Place	1900	00/22/22/26/28/28/29/29/30/32/34	11
Miss	Evelyn	Haig	87 Comely Bank Avenue	1901		0
Miss	Anne	Macfarlane	Nairn Lodge, Duddingston	1901		0
Mrs		Palmer Pringle	Bankhead, Laverockbank Road	1901		0
Miss	Isabella	Landale	Eildon Street	1901	03/04/05/06/06/07/08/12/14/14/15/16/17/18/18/19/20/20/21/21/21	21
Mrs	J	Spens	4 Duke Street	1901		0
Miss		Walker	8 Bellevue Cres	1901		0
Miss		Stewart		1901		0
Miss	Violet	Stewart		1901		0
Miss		Mitchell	9 Doune Tce	1901		0
Mrs	James	Adam	16 India Street	1901		0
Miss		Kelman	29 Dick Place	1901	03/09/	2
Miss		Anderson	15 Stirling Road	1901		0
Mrs		Steel (Lady Steel)	Colinton Road	1901	04/07	2
Miss		McDonald	2 Carlton St	1901		0
Miss		Thompson	Laurel Bank, Bonnington	1901		0
Miss		Nisbet	11 Royal Tce	1901		0
Miss	S.M.	Cooper	2 Alva St	1901		0
Dr	Jessie	McGregor	8 Walker St	1902		0
Miss	Montgomery	Bell	Great King Street	1902		0
Miss		Dowie Brown	7 Brandon St	1902		0
Miss	Esther	Miller	6 Albany St	1902	03/04/05/06/06/07/08/08/08/09/10/11/11/11/12/12/12/12/13/13/14/14/16/17/18/18/18/19/19/19/20/21/21/22/23/23/23/23/24/24/25/25/25/26/28/28/28/29/30/30/31/31/32/32/33/33/33	57
Miss		Milligan	39 Royal Tce	1902	03/	1
Miss	Chrystal	Macmillan	Corstorphine Hill House	1902	03/08/	2
Miss		Nisbet	18 Claremont St	1903		0
Mrs		Gibb	2 Bruntsfield Cres	1903		0
Miss		Boyd	15 Lonsdale Tce	1903	03/04/	2
Miss		Gray	59 Dick Place	1903	03/05/06/07/08	5

Title	First Name	Surname	Address	Date of joining Society	Involved in debating (years)	No. of debates involved in
Mrs		Kennedy Fraser	3 Mayfield Road	1903	05/	1
Miss	J.E.	Dowell	13 Palmerston Place	1903		0
Miss		Dewar	19 Royal Circus	1903		0
Miss	E.S.	Wright	41 Colinton Road	1903	05/06/14/	3
Mrs		Monro *nee* Reid	46 Murrayfield Avenue	1903		0
Mrs		Riach	3 Upper Dean Tce	1903	04/	1
Miss	Louisa	Lumsden	Warklow, Colinton	1904		0
Miss		Middleton	22 Grovesnor St	1904		0
Miss	May	Gillan	19 Grovesnor St	1904	08/10/	2
Mrs		Watson	The Lee, Corstorphine	1904		0
Mrs		Purves	24 Howard Place	1904	05/07/10/14/11/12/14/15/ 16/17/17/17/19/19/20/21/ 21/21/23	19
Mrs		Campbell	25 Moray Place	1904		0
Mrs		Millar	22 Howard Place	1904	16/17/	2
Mrs	Ross	Cooper	15 Woodhall Tce, Juniper Green	1904	04/05/06/08/08/09/17/18	8
Mrs		Oliver	10 Magdala Cres	1904		0
Mrs		Graham	3 Lennox St	1904		0
Miss	Louisa	Brown	14 Ainslie Place	1904		0
Miss	Florence C.	Urquhart	5 St Colme St	1905	05/06/08/08/09/11/12/13/ 14/22/24/26/27/27/30/31/ 32/33/	18
Mrs		Young	12 Royal Tce	1905		0
Mrs		Lang	122 Gilmore Place	1905	05/06/07	3
Miss	M.	Rose	13 Alva Street	1905	06/07/08/10/10/13/13/15/ 16/17/18/22/22/22/23/23/ 25/27/	18
Miss		Fairweather	6 Oxford Tce	1905	06/	1
Mrs	Noel	Paton	7 Strathearn Place	1905		0
Mrs	Robert	Stewart	38 Danube St	1905		0
Miss	Mabel	Anderson	20 Inverleith Row	1905		0
Mrs		Annan	6 Cluny Tce	1905		0
Mrs		Thompson	3 Grosvenor Street	1905		0
Miss		Considine	50 Palmerston Place	1905		0
Miss		Wood	30 Fountainhall Road	1906	07/10/13/14/21/23/27/	7
Lady	Margaret	Sackville	Magdala Place	1906	26/	1
Countess		of Cassilis	1 Moray Place	1906		0
Miss		Shaw	14 Dean Park Cres	1906		0
Miss		Logan	6 Palmerston Place	1906	09/	1
Mrs (Lady)		Leslie Mackenzie	1 Stirling Road	1906	06/07/10/17/24/24/25/29/ 31/33	10
Mrs		Campbell Brown	4 York Place	1906	07/08/11/13	4
Miss	Mary	Reid		1906	78/	1
Miss		Muir	12 West Castle Road	1906		0

Title	First Name	Surname	Address	Date of joining Society	Involved in debating (years)	No. of debates involved in
Mrs		Irons	8 Wester Coates	1906		0
Mrs	A.S.	Campbell	12 Lansdowne Cres	1906		0
Lady		Watson	22 Learmonth Tce	1906		0
Mrs		Gillespie	15 Clarendon Cres	1907	10/11/	2
Mrs	Gordon	Brown	20 Royal Circus	1907	09/10/11/11/12/14	6
Lady		Stormonth Darling	10 Great Stuart St	1907		0
Miss		Mitchell	13 Walker St	1907		0
Miss		Thorburn	Peebles	1907		0
Miss		Hagon	25 Castle Tce	1907		0
Mrs		Wallace	9 Lynedoch Place	1907	09/11/12/13/14/14/15/16/ 17/18/18/19/21/21/22/23/ 23	17
Mrs		Dietmar	Murrayfield Gdns	1907	07/	1
Mrs		Simpson	50 Melville Street	1907		0
Mrs		Bartholome w	Newington House	1907		0
Lady		Berry	North Berwick	1907		0
Miss	Dorothy	Berry	North Berwick	1907	08/09/10/11/12/13/	6
Miss	K.	Haid	10 Blackford Road	1907		0
Mrs		Wyld	Hillbank, Grange Loan	1908		0
Miss		Boag	63 Frederick St	1908		0
Mrs		Stanford	Redcotes, Colinton	1908		0
Mrs		Bell	1 Douglas Cres	1908		0
Miss		Day	9 Regent Tce	1908		0
Mrs		Cumming Craig	9 Learmonth Tce	1908	09/11/14/15/	4
Mrs		Tod	Glenesk, Polton	1908	09/	1
Mrs	C.	Gillan	Regent Tce	1908	09/11/	2
Miss	F.E.	Balfour	15 Northumberland St	1908		0
Miss		Murdoch	Tantallon Tce, North Berwick	1908		0
Miss		Vuillamy	3 South Learmonth Gdns	1908	09/	1
Mrs	James	Johnston	1 Grosvenor Gdns	1908	10/13	2
Lady		Low	12 Drumsheugh Gdns	1908		0
Miss		Campbell	12 Randolph Cres	1908		0
Miss		Blair	15 Randolph Cres	1908		0
Mrs		McKelvie	1 Hamilton Tce	1908	11/	1
Miss		McNab	20 Belgrave Cres	1908		0
Miss	J	Elder	4 John's Place	1909		0
Mrs		Herdman	Palace Hotel	1909		0
Miss	Helen	Lamb		1909		0
Miss		Duncan	12 Learmonth Gdns	1909	95/15/	2
Miss		Campbell Noble	12 Nelson St	1909	10/	1
Mrs		Crabbie	8 Rothesay Tce	1909	10/	1
Mrs		Sanders	22 Albany St	1909		0
Mrs		Carmichael	6 Hailes St	1909		0
Miss		Greenlees	26 Coates Gardens	1910	14/20/30/	3

Title	First Name	Surname	Address	Date of joining Society	Involved in debating (years)	No. of debates involved in
Mrs		Howieson		1910		0
Miss		Somerville	24 Scotland Street	1910	11/	1
Miss		Cran	19 Murrayfield Drive	1910		0
Miss		Baillie	24 Woodburn Tce	1910		0
Lady		Carlaw Martin	18 Blackford Road	1910	12/13/13/15/16/16/17/17/ 18/18/19/23/29/29/31/32/ 33/	17
Miss	Lucy	Black	30 Saxe-Coburg Place	1911	12/	1
Miss		Scott Moncrieff	The Castle, Elie	1911	34/34/	2
Miss		Glendinning	5 North Charlotte St	1911		0
Miss	W	Weir	17 Royal Tce	1911		0
Miss		Ogilive	Colinton	1911		0
Mrs		Hamilton	25 Regent Tce	1911		0
Mrs		Jardine		1911	91/09/16/20/	4
Miss	Ethel	Login	22 Stafford St	1911		0
Mrs		Inverarity	Hill House, Corstorphine	1912		0
Miss	Mary	Tweedie	61 Craiglea Drive	1912	12/12/14/14/15/16/17/	7
Mrs		McCunn	Ben Creach Lodge, Tarbet	1912		0
Mrs		Hanson	2 Grosvenor Gdns	1912	12/13/15/	3
Mrs		Anderson	4 Coates Place	1912		0
Mrs	Andrew	Murray	10 Western Terrace	1912		0
Miss		Galbraith	6 Rochester Terrace	1912	14/	1
Mrs		Mitchell	13 India Street	1912		0
Mrs	Francis	James	26 Murrayfield Road	1913		0
Mrs		Oldham	18 Succouth Ave	1913		0
Miss	Effie	Skelton	The Hermitage, Braid	1913	27/28/30/32	4
Mrs		Reid	Winterfield, North Berwick	1913	13/	1
Mrs	Massey	Fletcher	23 George Square	1914		0
Miss		Stevenson	50 Great King Street	1914		0
Mrs		Grant	31 Northumberland St	1914		0
Mrs		Meyer	12 Leven Street	1914		0
Miss	E.	Buchanan	8 Merchiston Place	1914		0
Miss		Watson	17 Glencairn Cres	1914		0
Miss		Grey	35 Braid Avenue	1914		0
Miss	Inglis	Clark	Rosedene, Lauder Road	1914	15/17/24/31/	4
Mrs	Boog	Watson		1915		0
Miss	K.	Laudale	9 Eildon Street	1916		0
Miss		Miller	10 India Street	1916		0
Mrs		Touche	23 Morton Hall Road	1917		0
Mrs		McLauchlin	22 Melville Street	1917		0
Miss		Sellar	15 Buckingham Terrace	1917	18/18/19/20/21/26/28/29/ 33/	9

Title	First Name	Surname	Address	Date of joining Society	Involved in debating (years)	No. of debates involved in
Mrs	Norman	Wells	56 India Street	1918	19/	1
Miss		Bell	3 Rosebery Crescent	1919		0
Mrs	Goodhall	Thomson	8 Duke Street	1919	20/32/	2
Miss		Lawrie	5 Moray Place	1919	20/21/24/27/	4
Miss	M.	Cowan	4 Gloucester Place	1919		0
Mrs		Thomson	25 India Street	1919		0
Mrs	Winter	Robb	1 Melville Crescent	1919	19/20/23/26/28/32/	6
Miss		Begbie	1 Merchiston Gardens	1919	29/30/31/	3
Miss		Mackintyre		1919		0
Mrs		Johnston	7 West Coates Road	1920		0
Mrs		Thomson	26 Heriot Row	1920		0
Mrs		Morgan	1 Midmar Gardens	1920		0
Miss		Ritchie	37 Royal Terrace	1920		0
Miss		Forbes	11 Darnaway Street	1920	20/23/	2
Miss	Amy	Fairlie	St Alban's Road	1920	20/21/	2
Miss	Sarah	Anstruther	19 Rutland Square	1920	21/22/23/31/	4
Mrs		Sharp	19 Queen Street	1920	26/	1
Mrs		McGregor	3 Wester Coates Place	1920		0
Dr		Dobbie	3 Lonsdale Terrace	1920		0
Mrs		Clapperton	8 Magdala Crescent	1920		0
Mrs		Budgen	27 Ann Street	1921	21/23/24/24/25/25/25/26/ 27/28/33/	11
Mrs		Riach	3 Upper Dean Terrace	1921		0
Mrs		Harrison	Warrender, Murrayfield	1921	15/16/25/31/	4
Miss		Thomas	40 India Street	1921		0
Mrs		Stuart	161 Colinton Road	1922		0
Miss	Lettice	Milne Rae	9 Drummond Place	1922	22/23/24/25/26/27/28/29/ 29/30/30/30/31/31/31/31/ 32/32/33/34/34/	21
Mrs	James	Readman	7 Melville Crescent	1922		0
Miss		McKnight	Buchanan Hostel, Craigmillar	1922	24/	1
Mrs		Watt	Craiglockart House	1923		0
Miss	Florence	Wyer	17 Chester Street	1923		0
Mrs		Thompson	26 Heriot Row	1923		0
Mrs	Hamilton	More-Nisbet	42 Murrayfield Gardens	1923	24/25/26/28/	4
Mrs		Douglas	19 Chester Street	1923		0
Mrs		Robertson	19 Warrender Park	1923	24/	1
Mrs		McLellan	Hillhead, Grange Loan	1924	26/29/30/33/33/33/	6
Mrs	Balfour	Kinnear	3 Doune Terrace	1924		0
Mrs		Northcote	13 Stanhope Place	1924		0
Miss		Bury	6 East Clarmont Street	1924	24/25/26/30/31/	5
Mrs		Corstorphine	Thirlestane, Colinton	1924	31/33/	2
Mrs		Grierson	12 Regent Terrace	1924		0
Miss		Bayly-Jones	11 Torpichen Street	1924	26/27/28/	3
Lady		Hodson	6 Chester Street	1924		0

Title	First Name	Surname	Address	Date of joining Society	Involved in debating (years)	No. of debates involved in
Mrs		Gaffney	Harrison Road	1924		0
Miss		Buchanan	2 Learmonth Terrace	1924		0
Miss		Thomson	23 Wester Coates Place	1924		0
Mrs		Ashworth	69 Braid Avenue	1924		0
Mrs		Young	Colinton	1924		0
Mrs		Whyte	14 Hamilton St, Joppa	1924		0
Mrs		Graham	22 Palmerston Place	1924	25/26/27/29/	4
Miss		MacLagan	25 Heriot Row	1925	27/	1
Miss		McFarlane	St Colme Street	1925		0
Miss	Isabel	Macdonald	17 Learmonth Gardens	1925	27/	1
Mrs		Cumming	Colinton	1925	27/	1
Mrs		Northcote	6 Coates Gardens	1925		0
Mrs		Griffiths	42 Moray Place	1925		0
Mrs		Marr	10 Succouth Avenue	1925	31/31/31/32/32/33/33/34/	8
Miss	Annie	Scott	8 Doune Terrace	1925		0
Mrs		Robinson	25 Nile Grove	1925		0
Mrs		Simpson	25 Chester Street	1925		0
Mrs		Darwin	3 Ravelston Park	1925		0
Mrs		Cadell	Brae Lodge, Murrayfield	1925		0
Miss	Alice	Smith	Colinton	1926	26/28/29/30/31/31/32/33/ 33/33/	10
Mrs		Ballingall	4 Lansdowne Cres	1926	27/28/29/32/33/	5
Miss	Mary	Paterson C.B.E.	Eildon Street	1926	27/28/29/30/31/31/32/33/ 33/34/	10
Mrs		Henderson	2 Grosvenor Gdns	1926		0
Mrs	L.	Pike	Rosetta, Liberton	1926		0
Miss	Julia	Grant	Moredun House, Fettes	1926		0
Miss		Nicholson	20 Manor Place	1927		0
Miss		Herdman	Kinellan, Murrayfield	1927		0
Miss	Fordyce	Andrew	4 Melville Place	1927	29/30/33/34	4
Miss	E.	Dick Peddie	13 South Learmonth Gardens	1927	29/	1
Mrs		Bald	Colinton	1927		0
Mrs	Francis	Boyd	15 India Street	1927	28/	1
Miss	M.	Stuart	6 Belgrave Crescent	1927		0
Mrs	Meade	King	Murrayfield Gardens	1927	27/29/	2
Miss		Findlay	5 Lennox Street	1927	28/	1
Mrs	Herbert	Haldane	21 Palmerston Place	1928	28/29/	2
Mrs		Stephensen	3 Oxford Terrace	1928		0
Mrs	Courteney	Shiells	Grange Loan	1928		0
Mrs		Underwood	50 Morningside Park	1928		0
Mrs		Adam	Grosvenor Cres	1928		0
Lady		Greig	The Shaws, Crammond	1928		0
Mrs		Mitchell	17 Great King Street	1928		0

Title	First Name	Surname	Address	Date of joining Society	Involved in debating (years)	No. of debates involved in
Miss	Frances	Dickson	Braid Avenue	1928		0
Miss	Ewart	Smith	16 Queen Street	1928		0
Mrs		Porter	24 Manor Place	1929	31/31	2
Miss	Ishbel	Macandrew	16 York Place	1929		0
Miss	Lillian	Roger	1 Strathern Place	1929		0
Mdlle.		Le Harivel	5 Howe Street	1929	30/31/	2
Mrs		Anstruther	20 Palmerston Place	1929		0
Mrs		Stitt	29 Cluny Gardens	1929		0
Miss	Amy	Penney	14 Magdala Crescent	1929	31/31/	2
Mrs		Chisolm	16 Randolph Crescent	1930		0
Mrs	Graham	Donald	18 Carlton Terrace	1930	32/	1
Mrs		Dodds	15 Crawford Road	1930		0
Mrs		Burt	40 Murrayfield Avenue	1930	32/32/34/	3
Mrs	Kinloch	Anderson	Torwood, Colinton	1930		0
Mrs		Reid	Bruntsfield Hotel	1931		0
Mrs	Pressley	Smith	Ann Street	1931		0
Mrs		Kennedy	Great Stuart Street	1932		0
Mrs		Brady	17 Great King Street	1932		0
Mrs		Wishart	7 Crawford Road	1932	32/33/	2
Miss		Jamieson	33 Douglas Crescent	1932	33/	1
Miss		McPherson	29 Palmerston Place	1933		0
Mrs	Muir	Gray		1934		0
Mrs		Schacke	214 Braid Road	1934		0
Miss	Kate	Cattanach	3 Alvanley Terrace	1934		0

Appendix 3 - Biographical details of prominent members of The Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society.

The following sketches have been compiled from a wide variety of sources. Some of the sources have been scanty, or indeed, contradictory. Whilst every attempt has been made to ensure these sketches are accurate there many still be some idiosyncrasies.

Women have been listed under the name that they first joined the Society, subsequent names have been put in brackets.

Arnott, Mrs
Born in 1900. As a late recruit to the Society she wrote the section 'Memories of Crowded Years' in *Ladies in Debate*.

Bell, Miss Charlotte
Sister of Maria Bell. Member of National Association for the Promotion of Social Science.

Bell, Miss Maria
d. 1899. Sister of Charlotte Bell an early member of the Society wrote two published works, *The Country Minister's Love* Story (1895) and a volume of poems Song *of Two Homes* published posthumously in 1899.

Briggs, Mrs Arthur
A member of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science.

Burton, Miss Mary
Sister of Lizzie Burton. A member of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science.

Burton, Miss Lizzie
Sister of Mary Burton. A member of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science.

Burton, Miss Hill
Daughter of the historian, John Hill Burton (Histographer Royal for Scotland) and an artist in her own right. Arthur Conan Doyle lived with her family from the ages 5 to 7.

Carmichael, Miss Charlotte (Mrs Carmichael Stopes)
One of the first women in Scotland to take a university certificate. Renowned Shakespeare scholar, contributor to *The Athenaeum*. Suffrage Campaigner, wrote suffrage text *British Freewomen*. Mother of Marie Stopes. Friend of Helen Blackburn editor of *The Englishwoman's Review*.

Crudelius, Mrs Mary (Miss McLean)
b. 23/02/1839 d. 27/07/1877. In 1861 she married Rudolph Crudelius a German businessman in Leith. Although she never appears in the member's role of the Society Mrs Crudelius was certainly involved in its activities. She spoke to the Society on Women's Education and her obituary appeared in *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine*, written by Elizabeth Hamilton. In 1867 she founded the Ladies' Edinburgh Educational

Association (later called the Edinburgh Association for the Higher Education of Women). She was a signatory of the first petition to Parliament for the enfranchisement of women.

Cunningham, Miss M.A.
A member of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science.

Duncan, Mrs Morison
A member of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science.

Dundas, Miss Anne
Involved in the campaign for higher education for women, wrote *The St George's Hall Classes - notes by a member of committee* (1877) and *Beneath African Glaciers* about her travels in 1924.

Dundas, Miss Louisa
Remained unmarried but made the daring suggestion that the Society should not remain closed to men in 1873. She wrote at least one work of fiction, *Wrecked; not Lost* in 1872.

Dunlop, Miss Murray (Mrs Lindsay)
Wife of Professor Lindsay of Glasgow University. Editor of *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine.*

Findlay, Mrs Susan
A member of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science.

Fraser, Mrs Catherine
A member of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science.

Gillespie, Miss Eliza (Mrs Lees)
Wife of Sheriff Lees. Sister-in-law of Miss Mary Lees, also member of Society. Editor of *The Attempt* for some time.

Hamilton, Miss Elizabeth
Daughter of Sir William Hamilton the philosopher.

Hope, Miss Louisa
A member of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science.

Houldsworth, Miss Margaret
A founder of St George's School in Edinburgh. Did not take part in debates.

Ivory, Miss A.
A member of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science.

Kunz, Madame J.
A member of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science.

Lees, Miss Mary
d. 1930. Founder member of the Society. Sister-in-law of Eliza Gillespie, also a member. Involved in Poor Law Administration and the Temperance movement. Wrote *A Scotch Jewel newly set - a memorial sketch of Nellie Drysdale*. Member of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science.

Lorimer, Mrs Campbell
Renowned as an excellent political speaker on behalf of Liberalism. Mother of Eleanor Campbell, later Mrs Crichton Miller also a member.

Lorimer, Miss Louisa
A member of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science.

Lumsden, Louisa (later made a Dame and LLD)
b. 31/12/1840 in Aberdeen. She participated in the first course of lecturers put on by the Ladies' Edinburgh Educational Association in 1868 at Edinburgh University then went on to Girton where, in 1873, she was one of the first three women to take the Honours Examination in Classics at Cambridge and an LLD degree. She was the first headmistress of St. Leonard's School from 1877-1882. Later she was warden of the Women's Hostel at St. Andrew's University. Renowned as a powerful speaker she campaigned, most prominently, for the suffrage movement and anti-vivisection groups. A member of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science. She was President of the Scottish Suffrage Summer School at St. Andrew's in 1914 and a member of suffrage societies in both Aberdeen and Edinburgh. She wrote an autobiography, *Yellow Leaves*.

Mackay, Miss Lydia Miller
Wrote *The Return of the Emigrant* (1907).

Macmillan, Miss Chrystal (Jessie)
1871-1937. Matriculated as student of Edinburgh University in 1892 (the first year women could matriculate). Graduated from Edinburgh University in 1896 with a first-class BSc honours degree in Mathematics and Natural Philosophy and in 1900 with a MA in Mental and Moral Philosophy. Member of 'Committee of Women Graduates of the Scottish Universities (Parliamentary Franchise)'. She was both Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer of this committee. Brought action in the Court of Session against the University Courts for withholding voting papers from them in the election of the University seat for St Andrews and Edinburgh in the general election, 1906. She was an active member of the Scottish Universities Women's Suffrage Union, the Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage and the NUWSS's executive committee. She was a founder member of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in 1915 and was secretary of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance from 1915-1925. She practised as a barrister after the war.

Mackenzie, Mrs Leslie
Mrs Mackenzie was on the committee of the Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage.

Macpherson, Mrs Brewster
Wrote two religious works: *Omnipotence Belongs Only to the Beloved* (1876) and, under the pseudonym, X.H. *Gifts for Men* (1870).

Mair, Sarah Elizabeth Siddon (later a Dame)
b. 1846 d.1941. President of the Society for its 90 year duration and editor in chief of both its publications. She had four sisters, Frances, Helena, Harriot and Elizabeth. Her father was ex-army, Major Mair, subsequently a councillor and her mother was Elizabeth Harriot Mair, a member of her daughter's Society.

She was Granddaughter of Sarah Siddons the celebrated actress, and also related to the Kemble family of actors. Became Dame of the British Empire. Given an Honorary LLD in 1920 in recognition of her work in education; she was a founder member (at 22) of the Edinburgh Ladies Educational Association and was a founder of Masson Hall, the University of Edinburgh's women's hall. She was also involved in the foundation of St. George's School and Training College and the Edinburgh School of Cookery (later Queen Margaret College). Not just concerned with education she was a founder of the Scottish Women's Hospitals with Dr Elsie Inglis, and The Women's Hospital in Edinburgh. She was President of the Scottish Federation of the NUWSS and the later Society for Equal Citizenship. Also member of the Shakespeare Society, Archery Club and Chess Club and a member of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science.

Masson, Miss Flora
Author of many books. Daughter of Professor David Masson of Edinburgh University. Sister of Rosaline.

Masson, Miss Rosaline.
Author and historian. In 1912-13 she was a speaker at NUWSS meetings. In 1913 she became honorary secretary of the Edinburgh branch of the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association. She was later honorary secretary of the Edinburgh National Society for Equal Citizenship. A Daughter of Professor David Masson of Edinburgh University. Sister of Flora.

Menzies, Miss Jane
Daughter of John Menzies of the stationers firm. Translator. Friend and travelling companion of Elizabeth Oswald.

Miller, Mrs
On Magistrate's Bench.

Miller, Mrs Morrison (formerly Mrs Campbell)
Died in 1935. Daughter-in-law of Hugh Miller, author of *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, daughter of Professor Buchanan. Friend of Robert Browning - founded the Edinburgh Browning Society in 1886. Mother of Mary Campbell, later Mrs Geddes. She wrote under the pseudonym Jeanie Morrison. On the committee of the Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage.

Neil, Agnes
Member of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science.

Neaves, Miss Helen
Daughter of Judge Lord Neaves and sister of Alice, also a member of the Society. She was honorary secretary of the Society for 27 years. A member of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science. Was lecturer at Holloway College for Women. Wrote 'Down the Vistas of the Years' in *Ladies in Debate*. Known for her conservative views and distinguished debates.

Oswald, Miss Elizabeth
A champion of 'open air' pursuits, she went hiking in Iceland with her friend Jane Menzies writing a memoir of their journey in *By Fell and Fjord* (1882). She wrote *Dragon of the North* that was serialised in *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine* over many month and subsequently published nationally. She also had articles published in *Good*

Words. She was a member of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science.

Paterson, Miss Mary, C.B.E.
Joined Society in 1926 and co-authored 'Impressions of two late-comers' in *Ladies in Debate.*

Rae, Miss Lettice Milne
Her mother, Mrs Milne Rae, was an early member of Society. She attended St. George's School form 1894-1901. Wrote several books including *Ladies in Debate* a history of the Society, in it she suggested that she would be secretary of a daughter society (The New Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society) but there is no record of this society available.

Reid, Miss Helen C.
Died: 1895. An early member of the Society she was both a secretary and an editor of its magazines, as the daughter of a Leith publisher it is assumed that she was suited for the job. She was secretary to Zenana and the Bible Medical Mission of the Church of Scotland. She wrote under the pseudonym Elfie.

Schwabe, Miss
A member of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science.

Sellar, E.M.
Published *Recollections and Impressions* (1908) an account of her participation of high society life in Victorian Edinburgh.

Seton, Miss Elizabeth (later Mrs Watson)
Editor of the magazines. She was mother of Mr Seton Watson an authority on the Balkans.

Simpson, Miss Eve Blantyre
Daughter of Sir James Young Simpson, discoverer of chloroform. Wrote recollections of family friend, R.L. Stevenson. It is noted that she intended to carry on the Society after 1935 at her home in Queen Street, however no record of this New Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society exists.

Simson, Miss Frances
Born in Edinburgh, April 1854, died 1938. Simson was daughter of the Secretary of the Bank of Scotland. One of the first eight women graduates of the Scottish Universities in 1893. Graduate of Edinburgh University. Member of 'Committee of Women Graduates of the Scottish Universities (Parliamentary Franchise)'. Brought action in the Court of Session against the University Courts for withholding voting papers from them in the election of the University seat for St Andrews and Edinburgh in the general election, 1906. President of the Scottish Univerisites Women's Suffrage Union and a vice-president of the Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage. President of the National Society for Equal Citizenship after the War. She was Warden of Masson Hall of Residence for Women Students in Edinburgh for over 20 years from 1897. Conferred with the honorary LLD degree by Edinburgh University in 1933.

Steel, Mrs (later Lady)
Married to an Edinburgh Lord Provost she was subsequently widowed. On the Committee of the Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage. In 1906 she spoke

at their Annual Meeting. She was on the executive committee and the Women's Franchise and Local Government committee of the Scottish Women's Liberal Federation. Sought election to Edinburgh Town Council in 1907 (the first woman to do so). She was one of the women who withheld taxes in protest at the disenfranchisement of women.

Stevenson, Miss Eliza
One of the earliest supporters of women's suffrage in Victorian Scotland and a founder member of the Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage. A member of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science.

Stevenson, Miss Flora LLD
1839-1905. Flora had a lifelong interest in education, she was elected with Phoebe Blyth in 1873 as the first women on a School Board. She was representative on the Edinburgh Educational Trust, Governor of George Heriot's Trust and honorary fellow of the educational institute for Scotland. In 1899 the Board School at Comely Bank, Edinburgh was renamed the Flora Stevenson School. In 1903 she was made an LLD of Edinburgh University. A member of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science. Also involved in philanthropic concerns she was a member of the habitual offenders and juvenile delinquent departmental committee and on the departmental committee to advise the Scottish Office as to rules for inebriate reformatories. She was also a member of the Association for improving condition of the poor and director of the Blind Asylum. Flora also supported the suffrage movment and was a member of the National Society for Women's Suffrage. Her other interests were varied; she was the director of the Edinburgh philosophical institution, Vice-President of the Women's Liberal Unionist Association and in 1905 given freedom of the city of Edinburgh.

Stevenson, Miss Louisa LLD
1835-1908. Most prominently she was a campaigner for women's medical education but she was also involved in the fight for higher education for women in general. She was one of the founders of the Edinburgh School of Cookery and a manager of Masson Hall of residence for women at Edinburgh University. She was the first women to be elected to the Parochial Board in Scotland. She was on both the management committee of the Scottish Branch of Jubilee Nurses and the board of managers of the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. A member of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science. A supporter of women's suffrage she was known to be a compelling public speaker. She was on the committee of the Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage and spoke at their meeting in 1906, where she was also the chairperson. She was also renowned for her business capacity and knowledge of financial matters.

Stirling, Miss Amelia Hutchison MA
She was an examiner in history at St Andrew's University and a Lecturer at Cheltenham's Ladies' College. She wrote several works of history and some children's stories.

Stirling, Miss Elsie of Kippendavie (later Mrs Kellie McCallum)
Her pseudonym was Elsie Strivelyne. Member of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science.

Stitt, Mrs
Co-wrote 'Impressions of two late-comers' in *Ladies' in Debate*.

Tod, Miss
A member of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science.

Urquhart, Miss Florence C.
She was on the Committee of the Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage in 1906.

Urquhart, Miss Mary Jane
One of the committee that founded St George's School.

Walker, Miss Mary
Headmistress of St. George's School, Edinburgh. Member of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science.

Wigham, Miss Eliza
Born in Edinburgh in 1820, died Dublin, 1899. A Quaker who wrote about Quakerism in *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine*. Involved in the anti-slavery campaign. Joint secretary of the Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage from its beginning in 1867. On the executive committee of the Scottish Women's Liberal Federation.

Wright, Miss C.E. Guthrie
An early member of the Society. She was founder of the Edinburgh School of Cookery, later the School of Domestic Economy in Atholl Crescent, and later still, Queen Margaret College, Edinburgh. Member of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science.

Wood, Mrs Alexander
A member of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science.

Wood, Miss Grace
Joined the Society in 1874 and was honorary treasurer and secretary during her time as member. She was the granddaughter of Thomas Chalmers, Scottish preacher and political economist. Honorary Secretary and Treasurer of the Society for several years. She wrote 'Recollections of an Old Member' in *Ladies in Debate*.

Appendix 4 - Prevalence of Debating Topics

	1867	1868	1869	1870	1871	1872	1873	1874
Arts	0	0	4	2	3	3	3	0
Hist/Biog	0	3	3	1	0	0	1	1
Domestic 1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Domestic 2	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1
Foreign	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1
Education	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0
Law	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
Religion	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
Philosophy	0	0	0	3	1	1	6	2
Science	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Misc	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total No. of Debates	2	7	10	8	8	6	10	8

	1875	1876	1877	1878	1879	1880	1881	1882
Arts	2	2	2	3	4	2	1	1
Hist/Biog	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Domestic 1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Domestic 2	0	1	2	2	0	2	0	1
Foreign	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Education	1	1	1	4	1	0	1	2
Law	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
Religion	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	2
Philosophy	2	2	0	0	2	1	0	1
Science	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Misc	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total No. of Debates	8	8	8	9	7	7	6	7

	1883	1884	1885	1886	1887	1888	1889	1890
Arts	2	3	3	3	3	1	3	2
Hist/Biog	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0
Domestic 1	3	1	0	1	1	1	0	1
Domestic 2	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
Foreign	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Education	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	1
Law	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0
Religion	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Philosophy	2	0	2	0	0	3	3	1
Science	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Misc	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Total No. of Debates	9	8	8	6	7	7	7	7

	1891	1892	1893	1894	1895	1896	1897	1898
Arts	0	1	1	3	1	2	2	3
Hist/Biog	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Domestic 1	2	0	1	2	1	2	0	1
Domestic 2	3	3	4	0	1	0	0	1
Foreign	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Education	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1
Law	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Religion	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0
Philosophy	1	2	1	0	1	1	3	1
Science	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Misc	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total No. of Debates	8	8	8	7	7	7	7	7

	1899	1900	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906
Arts	3	3	1	1	2	2	3	3
Hist/Biog	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
Domestic 1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0
Domestic 2	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
Foreign	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Education	0	1	1	1	1	2	0	1
Law	0	0	0	1	1	0	3	0
Religion	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Philosophy	0	`1	1	3	0	1	1	0
Science	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Misc	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total No. of Debates	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7

	1907	1908	1909	1910	1911	1912	1913	1914
Arts	1	2	2	3	2	3	1	2
Hist/Biog	1	0	2	1	2	1	1	1
Domestic 1	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	0
Domestic 2	2	0	0	1	2	0	0	1
Foreign	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Education	2	0	3	0	1	1	0	0
Law	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	2
Religion	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Philosophy	0	3	1	1	0	2	1	1
Science	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Misc	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total No. of Debates	7	8	7	7	7	7	7	7

	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921	1922
Arts	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	2
Hist/Biog	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0
Domestic 1	1	2	1	1	1	0	2	0
Domestic 2	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	2
Foreign	1	1	0	0	4	0	0	1
Education	1	0	1	2	0	1	0	0
Law	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Religion	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Philosophy	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	2
Science	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Misc	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total No. of Debates	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7

	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930
Arts	3	2	1	2	0	1	3	2
Hist/Biog	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0
Domestic 1	2	0	2	0	0	1	1	1
Domestic 2	2	2	0	1	1	1	0	0
Foreign	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Education	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0
Law	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0
Religion	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Philosophy	0	2	1	1	0	2	1	0
Science	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Misc	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total No. of Debates	7	7	5	5	5	7	5	5

	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935
Arts	1	2	2	0	2
Hist/Biog	0	1	0	1	0
Domestic 1	0	1	0	0	0
Domestic 2	3	0	2	0	0
Foreign	0	0	1	0	0
Education	1	1	0	2	0
Law	1	1	1	0	0
Religion	0	0	0	1	0
Philosophy	1	0	0	0	1
Science	0	0	0	0	0
Misc	0	0	0	0	0
Total No. of Debates	6	5	6	4	3

Appendix 5 - Pseudonyms used in *The Attempt* and *The Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine*.

This information has been taken from *Ladies in Debate* and a copy of Volume 4 of *The Attempt* in the National Library of Scotland, which has been inscribed by Helen Reid, one of the founder members of the Society.

Sarah Siddons Mair -	des Eaux (From Baron des Eaux, an ancestor who sought refuge in England during the Huguenot persecutions in France.
Helen Reid	Elfie / Pro Virtue
Robina Warrack	Veronica
Agnes Neil	Meigeag Bheag
Charlotte Carmichael	Lutea Reseda / E.H.S.
Mary Lees	Clarence
Bessie Scott Moncrieff	Frucara
Elsie Stirling	Elsie Strivelyne
Katherine Tuke	Alma
Miss Cobbin	Mas Alta
Eliza Gillespie	Dido
Mary Bonar	M.L.
Elizabeth Oswald	E.J.O.
Eliza Wigham	E.S.
Mrs Campbell Morrison	Jeanie Morrison
Miss Humphrey	Martyn Hay
Miss R. Balfour	R
Anne Dundas	Rustica
Miss Stuart	Melensa
Miss Spalding	Sanct Rewle
Miss Brewster Macpherson	Liebchen
Miss Guthrie	Echo
Miss Dunlop	M.E.T.
C.E. Guthrie Wright	Eta
Jenny Dunlop	Grace

Appendix 6 - Published works by members of the Society

As only second or subsequent sisters were given their Christian names in the role of the Society and those who were married to referred to by their husband's name this is necessarily a limited list of the published production of members of the Society. This list has been compiled using the databases of the National Library of Scotland and the British Library; as many of the records are retroconverted and temporary they often do not show publisher's details, so this information is omitted in many cases.

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Dundas, Anne, *Beneath African Glaciers: the humours, tragedies and demands of an East African Government station as experienced by an official's wife: with some personal views on native life and customs* (London: [n. pub.], 1924)

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